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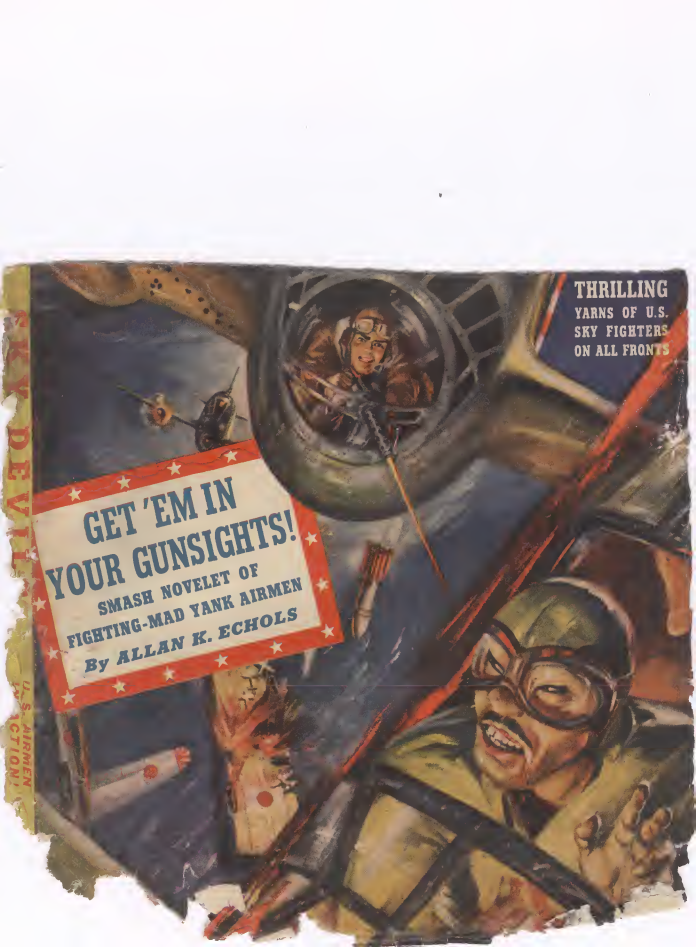
SKY DEVILS

10

THE
HISTORY OF THE
AIR FORCE
OF THE UNITED STATES

GET 'EM IN
YOUR GUNSIGHTS!
THE
HISTORY OF THE
AIR FORCE OF THE UNITED STATES
BY JAMES H. MURPHY





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ON ALL FRONTS**

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By ALLAN K. ECHOLS

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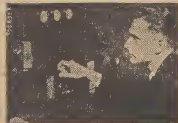
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10c *American* SKY DEVILS

VOL. 1, NO. 5

APRIL, 1943

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ROBERT O. EISMAN—EDITOR

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GET 'EM IN YOUR



He shoved his throttles full ahead and screamed downward

CHAPTER I

THE new aircraft carrier, **YELLOWJACKET**, her running lights darkened, plowed through the black south Pacific without showing a sign of herself except the phosphorescent glow of her wake. Under the

broken overcast which almost blotted out the stars, her escort of two destroyers were only black, rolling blobs on the faintly glowing sea.

Racing under forced draft to join the task force in the Solomons as replacement for a sunken sister carrier, she was vulnerable and in enemy waters.

SMASH AIR-WAR YARN OF THE YANK SKY-DEVILS BACKING

GUNSIGHTS!

by ALLAN K.
ECHOLS



to meet them face to face—with all his guns blazing!

As replacement for a sunken sister carrier, The Yellow Jacket was vulnerable and in enemy waters, and Fighter Pilot Michael Latimer knew it was up to his Wildcat Squadron to take her through!

It was known that her presence was suspected and that enemy patrols were searching for her. She had been on the

stand-by alert for seventy-two hours.

In the smoky light of the forward ready room, Michael Latimer sat along

UP THE MARINES WHO BLASTED THE JAPS OFF GUADALCANAL!

with thirty other pilots, smoking and drinking black coffee. He had not had his togs off in three days and nights, and his face was tense and showed lack of sleep, as he listened to the ready-walker.

The talker, an enlisted yeoman, stood at one end of a long blackboard at the front end of the room, wearing a pair of headphones and a mouthpiece hanging around his neck by a strap. As "Air Plot," the heart of air operations, near the bridge, worked out the constantly changing data of position and conditions, the talker announced it and marked it on the blackboard, while the flyers marked the new information on their individual chartboards.

The talker was announcing the latest bearings.

"Ceiling eight hundred feet, overcast. Surface wind blowing one-hundred-eighty degrees, twenty knots, steady. Position of *Yellowjacket* at two-fifteen was nine degrees, thirty minutes south latitude, one - hundred - sixty - four degrees, five minutes, east longitude. Course, one-hundred-eighty-nine degrees, True. Speed twenty-three knots. Nearest land, San Christobal Island bearing one-hundred-seventy-one degrees, True. San Christobal thought to be occupied by enemy."

MICHAEL rubbed his scratchy eyes and wrote the information on his chart, wrote it mechanically, grudgingly. "Why am I doing this?" he asked himself. "What do I care where we are? What does the skipper care whether I get lost or not? Pilots are expendable."

Michael was bitter. It was only last night that Petey, his roommate, had gone overboard. The ship was rolling and pitching in the darkness, and there had been an enemy patrol alarm. Number Two Fighter had gone aloft to intercept, and Petey's ship was just taking

off the runway when the bow of the carrier dropped under a swell. Petey's fighter dipped a wing, caught a wave and nosed into the black water. And the carrier kept going. They couldn't risk the carrier just to pick up one man.

Men were expendable—the carrier was not!

Suddenly the clang of a gong broke in on Michael's bitterness, the clanking noise banging out "Battle Stations!" At the signal, the whole ship seemed to come alive and to fairly writhe with noises, the bugle blasting through the loudspeaker, the boats'n's pipe shrilling its queer signal, and the sudden roar of the lines of aircraft motors on the flight deck.

The talker was frantically writing new figures on the blackboard, adding his voice to the mechanical voices which filled the air, while the bulkhead door opened and closed rapidly, admitting running pilots pulling on their gear as they came to report to the ready room.

As the bulkhead door opened, it automatically switched the lights from bright to battle blue, and as it closed switched them back to bright again. Lieutenant Commander Flowers, the flight executive officer came in and called for attention.

"Gentlemen," he announced, in a voice which long training had made it possible to keep under control. "We have been hearing enemy planes for an hour, but until now it was not definitely established that they had discovered us. Now we know that three of them have spotted our wake through breaks in the overcast, and are trying to get a run over us. We will try to keep under the overcast, but those bombers must be destroyed or we will not last long after daylight—particularly if the cloud ceiling breaks up. Number Four Fighter Squadron will take off and attack on sight. Others will stand by."

Flowers spoke in a tense but controlled voice. "You understand, that when you go aloft you will be on your own. The carrier must try to save itself, and for that reason we cannot break radio silence to give you our position. If any fighter gets lost, he will immediately try to make the base at Guadalcanal, if that is impossible, the nearest land. Good luck to you all, gentlemen."

The tense officer had hardly finished and turned to go out when the bull horn roared;

"Number Four Fighter Squadron Pilots, man your planes!"

The noise around him was a blur to Michael as he downed the last of his scalding coffee, picked up his chart-board and raced out into the darkness of the walkway below the flight deck. The apparent confusion aboard the ship was as nothing to the confusion in his own whirling brain.

This was the climax—the day for which his long, grueling training had been preparing him. He had learned to fly, had become a good flyer—but down deep in his heart he nursed a deep fear!

Yes, it was fear! He had admitted it to himself a thousand times, had tried to force himself to go to his commanding officer and tell him that he was afraid, that he knew he would fail the first time he faced an enemy ship. Training was one thing. He had been a good pilot, a quick student. But pulling a trigger on another man, flying into the flaming lead of a Jap Zero—that was something else again!

IT WAS dark as ink out on the walkway as Michael groped along its length, looking for the ladder up to the flight deck which the spotting chart told him was alongside the position in which his Wildcat was spotted. He found the ladder, climbed it to the long flight deck where motors bellowed an ear-splitting

din, and the blue plumes of exhaust fire shot out of the motors' exhaust ports like the flames from guns. The roar of motors was deafening.

Gripping his precious chart board, he slid down on his belly on the wet deck and started crawling under the fuselage of the nearest plane, inching his way forward against the fierce blowing of the prop wash, toward his own ship.

Michael didn't like it. He hadn't wanted to be a flyer in the first place. But he had never in his life been able to do a thing he had wanted to do. His mother had wanted to be a concert singer, and she had failed, and so she had taken out her ambition on him. She had stuck a fiddle in his hands when he was four years old, and the rest of his twenty-one years had been spent running musical scales. Miles, thousands of miles of scales. Hour after dreary hour of drudgery. He had heartily hated it—but he could not stop. And flying had turned out to be the same, discipline, hours and days of monotonous practice, drudgery. . . .

HE HAD wanted to go into the Tank Corps when the war started. He had hoped that he could get into one of those rumbling, rattling land leviathans where he could get greasy and dirty, and slug it out head-on with the Germans. But no, his mother admired the uniforms of the Naval Aviators, and his mother had a spell with her weak heart every time Michael didn't agree with her. So—he had gone into Naval Aviation.

He felt the heat from the exhaust of his motor, and the blast from the propeller of his ship whipped his clothing around his frame as he got to his feet beside his trim little Grumman Wildcat. The captain of his plane crew, a dark blob standing beside the ship, shouted;

"Good morning, sir. She's all cop-

setic."

Michael envied this Chief Petty Officer his freedom from the thousands of things which he, himself, felt hemmed him in. This tattooed, hard-working, hard-drinking man was free! Michael was not.

That was a good word, copasetic. It had popped up during the last war from nobody knew where. It meant "okay," and it had stuck and became part of the language. Michael knew what was wrong with him. It was just that everything wasn't copasetic with him. He wasn't a free man.

And one of the chains which bound him was fear. It was not that he was afraid of his ship, he was not afraid of being unable to handle his guns. But he was afraid of hurting anybody, even a Jap. But most of all, he was afraid that he would be a coward in the face of death. The one thing in his life which he had wanted, and had missed, was evidence that he had courage. But he had never had an opportunity to find out. And the lack of this knowledge made him fearful. His own mother had made him afraid of being hurt.

The chief was shouting at him through the prop blast. "Will you do something for me, sir?"

"What is it?" Michael asked.

"Knock one of those Jap propeller hubs down on the deck for me. I want a souvenir of what this Wildcat can do."

Michael had a hunch that the chief suspected him of needing a little assurance.

Michael slid into his seat. He left his parachute straps free so that if he went overboard he could get out in a hurry. Slipping his chartboard into its rack and fastening his safety belt and helmet chin strap, he shouted back:

"I'll bring it down personally, to be sure you get it."

And he didn't believe a word of what he was saying. The carrier had to keep

hidden under the lower overcast, circling off its course, twisting and turning to avoid exposing itself to a clear bombing run by the enemy—and it would not notify its pilots of its position!

MICHAEL looked around at the shadowy deck, at the scattered blue flames of the exhausts of the other planes on the deck. He was certain that he was seeing the last of this carrier. And of everything else in this life.

The carrier had swung around until it was headed into the wind, and now Michael could see the exhausts of ships ahead of him shooting forward like blue skyrockets. The ship spotted before him with Swede Jensen, his section leader, at the stick, suddenly shot down the deck in a streak of blue light. A great swell of the sea dropped the forward end of the carrier in a trough of water. Swede's speeding fighter swerved erratically, crashed off at an angle, tearing through stanchions, and dived into the black water.

Michael groaned. That was the end of the best pilot in his squadron. The carrier did not slow down, there was not one indication that a man had plunged to his death. That was what it was to be a carrier-based fighter.

The deck officer's hooded flashlight up forward made a tiny circle in the dark, and Michael goosed his ship up to the line just as though nothing had happened. Operations was not missing a beat in its ten-second timing of the ships it was sending off. Michael obeyed the signal, locked his brakes and gave his ship the throttle, while his crew stepped clear.

His eyes strained to the darkness, Michael saw the next signal, as the tiny flashlight in the deck officer's hand swept downward. He released his brakes, jammed the throttle full for-

ward and felt the ship try to jump out from under him. Its sudden acceleration shoved his body back against his cushions, while the dark forms of the flight deck crews sped past him like fence posts.

The rising deck of the carrier tossed him like a kite before he hit the end of the runway, threw him into the air—and stalled his ship. He had only split seconds to right himself—or else fall off into a spin and hit the water before he could pull out of it. You can't right a spin with only fifty feet of altitude between you and the salt waves.

Flying blind in the darkness, he fought the stall by instruments alone, nosing down to gain speed, setting the gear to crank up his wheels to reduce air resistance. He flattened out, fed her more coal, felt her catch hold of the black air, and started his climb.

He looked around for Swede, then remembered he'd never fall into position behind Swede again. He picked up the exhaust flames of the section ahead of him, and joined them. With Swede gone, he was leader of his section now.

Michael Latimer, the man who was afraid, had come out to lead his friends into battle!

CHAPTER II

IN THE darkness, Michael found only two of the four ships which had taken off before him. That would be Dineen, Gunnery officer and leader of the first section, and one of his men. Behind him, Michael could not see that either of the other men of his own section had followed him. His duty, then, was to fall into Dineen's section.

Even as he was fearful of his own ability to lead his section, he instantly resented finding himself again under

command of another, just as his life had always been. Michael didn't like Dineen, and hated himself for not liking the man. He admittedly envied him his daring, his sense of freedom. But he did not then see that it was Dineen's very command of himself which gave him his sense of freedom. Free because you were under control! That didn't make sense.

He had no time to grope with his troubles, for Dineen, who had been flying at reduced speed under the low overcast, now saw that he had only two men to follow him, and immediately gunned his ship and crawled up through the black, wet fog.

Michael did not again see the exhaust of his section until they pulled out above the lower overcast at twenty-five hundred feet. Here it was clear, and a bit lighter than below.

Clear, except that somewhere here in this expanse were at least three enemy bombers, searching for the wake of the carrier down below, and bristling with guns with which they could make it hot for any fighters trying to intercept them. Tactics taught that a good bomber could take care of itself against three fighters of the type based on carriers. On that basis, alone the odds were three to one against Michael and his wingmates ever seeing the carrier again.

It seemed futile to Michael, and he kept crying out, "Hurry! Come on, Dineen, let's get it over!" But Dineen was taking his time, leveling off and looking for signs of the bomber.

Michael wanted to break formation and climb, so that he could find the enemy and dive on them. Why didn't Dineen do that? You had to dive on those boys! But Dineen didn't climb again, and Michael could do nothing but keep his position in the section.

Then Dineen's sharp eyes caught the exhausts of the enemy bombers, and he

swerved to the left, cutting a long arc around to the rear of their path of flight. Then it was that Michael knew that he had been wrong and Dineen right. To have come upon the bombers from above would have revealed their own exhausts to the enemy. Dineen was coming in on them from the rear, and at their own level, the only blind spot the bombers had.

Michael felt chagrined that he had not thought of that. Maybe Dineen felt free because he knew so well what to do! Knowing that, he wouldn't always be imprisoned by doubt. Maybe Michael's sense of imprisonment was the result of his not being sure of himself.

MECHANICALLY he followed Dineen, like a man walking to the execution chamber. Dineen made a wide circle on the same level with the blue pinpoints of exhaust flames of the enemy bombers, and increased his speed as he endeavored to catch up with them.

There would be only one chance to whip them, that of complete surprise. They would have to be destroyed at the first burst, because there would never be another chance. The element of surprise would be gone, and then any one of the bombers would have a good chance to destroy the whole three of the fighters attacking it, and would then be free to watch the holes in the low overcast until it spotted the carrier and laid its eggs.

As they crept closer to the enemy, Michael saw that they were two-motored ships, medium Mitsuis, which he knew to have light armor and heavy machine guns in addition to its load of thousand-pound bombs.

Since surprise was essence of their chance of success, Dineen could not give orders through the radio, but he depended on the two men behind him to follow his lead, and see what was to be

done. The bombers ahead of them were flying in a large Vee, and Michael, flying to the left of his own Vee, picked out his bomber.

Mechanically, Michael was a good flyer. That was because he had spent a lifetime of learning to do things precisely.

Now that he was upon the unsuspecting enemy, his mechanical training came to the fore. As his feet pressed the rudder bar to the left, he broke out of his own Vee at the usual distance behind the enemy, which he had practiced so many monotonous hours. The number two man to Michael's right broke away to the right at the same time, and Dineen, at the head of the triad, continued straight ahead.

Michael took off his goggles, sighted through his telescopic sight, and found that there was still too much darkness for him to see through it. He went back to his ring sights, found the bomber which was his target in the rings, touched the rudder and stick enough to bring the bomber squarely in the cross hairs, then watched for Dineen's signal. They all had to shoot in unison, if the surprise was to be complete.

Michael kept the giant shadow of the bomber in his cross hairs, watching with one eye for the dim flash of the hooded light signal on the turtleback of Dineen's ship. Between the two, he had his mind fully occupied.

Then suddenly—before Dineen's signal came, the number Two Fighter spouted a red streak of tracers toward its target. "Nervous," Michael said. The man had become tense and fired before getting his signal.

MICHAEL could no longer wait for the signal. As the right-hand bomber caught a lacing of machine gun bullets, his radio opened up with a warning to the other bombers. The

bomber caught fire, its gas tanks ignited by the incendiary tracers, but he had managed to give his warning. Split seconds were precious now.

His own bombers, having dived off to the left, Michael now followed it. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that the man who had fired prematurely had at least managed to finish off his ship. But after that, Michael lost sight of the others.

He trailed his bomber down, and the bomber was trying to get him off its tail, and somewhere around to the side or overhead, so that its own protecting guns could finish him off. Michael kept the bomber in his ring sights and trailed it, with his thumb on the solenoid gun button on his stick.

He tried to get the ship once again squarely into the cross hairs, but the Jap would have none of this. Then Michael tried his guns. He pressed the button, watched for the tracers—

—and no tracers appeared!

Michael felt a real fear, searched desperately for the reason his guns had failed him. Why, now in this time of peril, this first test of his courage, should this happen to him? Frantically, he reviewed his actions, searching for the reason for the trouble. His plane chief had told him that she was all right.

His hands moved mechanically about his levers, his controls, while his eyes scanned everything inside the cockpit—and while the bomber was getting further and further out of his sights.

And then he found it. He had not prepared his guns. Cursing himself for a blundering fool, he pulled back his cocking levers and shoved them home. Then he tripped the button, and red pencilings of tracer bullets reached out toward the bomber he was following.

There was something coldly impersonal about his trying to get his sights on the target. It was mechanical, like

his practice firing had been against towed sleeve targets. He could even think of himself while he followed the Jap, could only think of his blundering forgetfulness. Suppose he had been on the defensive instead of the offensive, and with his guns unloaded? He was simply not cut out to be a fighter.

The bomber was getting away in a steep power dive, and in a second or so he would be into the lower stratum of clouds, escaping, and also possibly getting sight of the carrier as well.

Mechanically again, Michael shoved his throttles far past the maximum allowable power as he nosed over into a dive. This was at his own risk, for his motor could develop much more speed than the ship was built to withstand.

He followed the bomber down in a screaming dive, throwing a stream of tracers before him, seeing nothing except through the rings and crosshairs of his sights. In an instant he saw the cloud flooring swallow up the dark form of the bomber, and in another breath he himself was in the watery vapor.

HE CAME out of it within five hundred feet of the water, and one quick glimpse told him the whole story. The Jap had assumed that he would not escape, and at the same time, had seen the faint phosphorescent wakes of the destroyers and the carrier. If the Jap was to lose his life, he would crash dive the carrier and lay two thousand-pound bombs squarely on its deck. It would be well worth such a sacrifice for a Jap, as Michael knew.

Michael had the throttle all the way forward, and his tracers were biting closer and closer at the tail of the Jap bomber. He held his breath now, as his screaming Wildcat dove with a speed it was not built to survive.

Then his red tracer lines began disappearing into the body of the Mitsu, when that Jap ship lacked still five hun-

dred yards of being over the carrier. Michael touched his left rudder slightly, sewing a seam of his tracers up forward from the tail toward the nose of the bomber. And then his tracers found the Mitsu's gas tank.

There was a blinding red flash, like a bursting comet, and a brilliant streak of flame arced into the water a scant hundred feet from the carrier—and then it was dark again.

Michael saw the carrier's long, dark deck, and he wanted to go in and land on it. He had shot down his man, and that was his full share of the work. But he could not land now, because the job was not yet done. He nosed upward through the low ceiling again.

When he came out into the clear between the upper and lower overcasts, he looked around, and saw one fight. That would be Dineen, still trying to finish off his bomber by himself, the heavy odds against him brought about by the failure of his Number Two man to observe orders.

Michael forgot that he was envious of Dineen, and thought only that here was one case, at least, in which Dineen was right. Freedom from fear depended somewhat upon rigid control, yes, even upon monotonous practice, such as running scales on a fiddle. If the Number Two men had acquired that confidence by long practice, he would not have been nervous and endangered both Dineen's life and the existence of the carrier. That thought could be carried a lot further, but Michael had no time for it now. Dineen needed help.

Following the action by sight of the blue fire from the exhaust stacks and by the red pencilings of their tracer bullets, Michael saw that Dineen was finding it impossible to get back squarely on the tail of the bomber. He could have come in from any side and have reached it, but not necessarily before the Jap had found him.

Michael knew that Dineen was not a coward, that he was not afraid to come in and match fire with the Jap, but that he had caution, born not of his concern with his own safety, but for the safety of the carrier. Considering himself alone up here against this bomber, Dineen would know that if he were killed, this bomber would be free to wreck the carrier. Dineen *had* to keep himself alive to insure destroying the bomber if that was at all possible, and so he could not afford to take chances. More than his own life depended on his guns. He was fighting against almost insurmountable odds—but he was using his head.

"Well, here goes nothing," Michael shouted into the slipstream, and headed into Dineen's fight.

DINEEN could take care of himself. Michael would draw the bomber's fire in order to give Dineen a chance for a knockout blow.

He set his course to intercept the Jap bomber, which had apparently been too busy to see him. He did not deviate from his course as his path approached that of the bomber, and when he was within range, he opened up all wing guns and kept on coming, not deviating an inch to the right or to the left.

It was a mechanical sort of thing, backed by a cold rage. This bomber had to come down, and Michael had the ammunition to bring it down. Just stay on your course with all guns open, and stay with him until he blows apart!

He was pretty close when the Japs saw him and turned their attention to him. They gave him a burst from a side turret, and the steel of their bullets bounced him in his seat. Above the sound of his motor, he heard little noises going "plang," with a high-pitched whine, like a too-tight E-string on a fiddle when it breaks. That was bullets bursting through his transparent

cowling. The vibration that reached him through the seat of his pants was steel bullets playing a drumbeat on his armor plate.

But Michael was cold and calm about it all, and he kept his ship headed squarely toward the bomber, trying to make it deviate enough to throw its tail toward Dineen. Finally, his own fifty-millimeter shells became too much for even the suicidal Japs, and they turned aside—and when they did, Dineen was waiting for them. He dived straight toward the Mitsu's tail with his guns wide open, and he almost cut the tail off with his propeller before his incendiaries found the Jap's gas tanks and made a blazing, falling star out of it.

Michael just saw the beginning of that, because he suddenly found himself too busy trying to right himself. Somehow his controls were suddenly very sluggish, and he couldn't seem to work the rudder bar with his right foot. He fought the controls harder, found himself in a flat spin which took him into the foggy overcast, quit looking over the side and tried to right himself by his instruments. He had to throw the machine into a straight dive to get it out of its crazy spin, and when he pulled out of it and leveled off, he saw the faint pencilings of phosphorescent light which marked the crests of the ocean waves.

Even in the deceiving half-light of the darkness, he knew that he had missed diving into the sea by less than a hundred feet. He was flying level now, but his head was swimming, and the controls seemed still sluggish. He had no idea of where he was, nor of whether he could make the controls keep him out of the water. If some of them were shot away, others might have been damaged, and might go at any moment.

He tried climbing. It was slow, hard work, but it had to be done. It was suicide, skimming the water on a dark night with damaged controls. And yet

he would have to stay under the low ceiling if he were to find the carrier.

He looked around, and saw no lights about him. Dineen was not in sight. There was no sign of the carrier nor the destroyers.

In the excitement of the fight, he had forgotten to keep his bearings. A man had to add a kind of mental navigation, a constant orientation in his mind, remembering the directions and distances he had flown, so that he would have some idea of which way and how far away the carrier lay.

HE KNEW now that he had not done this. He had not the slightest idea of his distance or direction from the carrier. A fine flyer was Michael Latimer, he said disgustedly into his cockpit.

He checked his gas and saw that he had used much of it—much too much! He cut his throttle to a speed only enough to keep his lift, and set out North, which he flew for five minutes. Then he turned East and flew ten minutes, South fifteen minutes, West twenty—

And then he knew he was lost.

He opened his radio switch, started to call the carrier to ask for bearings—then shut it off. He had committed enough sins for one night.

He picked his chartboard out of its rack, found the reckoned distance and course to the nearest land and set his compass on it. Maybe he would make it—maybe not. What the hell?

CHAPTER III

NOW that the fight was over and he had accepted the fact that he was lost, his training forced his attention to a thing he had only noticed in passing while he had been trying to keep his ship from plunging into the sea. The trouble was peculiar. The

rudder bar worked easily when pushed on the left side, but not when he tried to shove the right side forward. Instinctively, he checked on this.

And now, when he could give it his attention, he made the discovery that the trouble was not with the rudder bar itself. The trouble was with his foot.

He wriggled his foot, or tried to wriggle it, and discovered that it would not wriggle. And now his nose registered a peculiar smell, that of burning wool. Then the next thing he was conscious of was a burning sensation around his ankle, and this was increasing rapidly.

He leaned over in his seat and thrust his left hand down to investigate, and it came back with the answer. He had been shot in the lower leg by an incendiary bullet, and it had ignited his wool-lined flying boot. The smouldering lining of the boot was burning him now.

He explored the wound just above his ankle, and as his finger found the bullet hole it suddenly dawned on him that he had been shot!

This seemed a miracle to him—for he had lived in dread of that day when he would feel the searing pain of a bullet. But there had been no searing pain! The small sting of the burn was all he felt, except a numbness in his leg.

That little pain was an important thing. It was more than that. It was the most important thing in his life! It was the thing which was now rending the chains which had for a lifetime bound him to fear.

It was a grand feeling, and a new one, and he relished it for a moment!

But only for a moment, for another thought came along to dash cold water on it. Now that he knew he could do his job without fear, it was meaningless to him after all. He was lost, and would not have another opportunity to go out and exercise his new-found freedom.

Disgustedly, he jerked at his stick, intent on zooming the ship and diving

it into the sea. The strain on his arm sent a sharp pain all the way up to his shoulder, and left a throbbing sensation in his hand.

HE TOOK the stick with his right hand, and held his left up before his face. In the dim light from the instrument panel he could not make out the full hand, seeing only his thumb and his first three fingers. Puzzled, he grabbed his flashlight out of the rack and shot the light on his gloved hand.

The little finger of his hand and glove were gone!

There were only shreds of leather where the finger should have been, and a coating of darkened blood. Still more bewildered, and unable to believe it, he examined it more closely.

He had seen rightly! A bullet had severed the finger cleanly at the first joint. And he hadn't even known it. He had never heard of the fact that the severance of a member usually acted as its own anesthetic by benumbing it to the point where there was no feeling left in it. He could only stare in blank astonishment at his crippled hand.

Realization of the fact penetrated his mind slowly. One joint of one little finger was gone—but—and now the significance of it hit him like a blinding flash of lightning—but, the bullet which had torn away that tiny piece of flesh and bone had also blasted away the last chain which bound him!

That Jap bullet had set him free!

That tiny piece of steel had shot away his whole career as a violinist! No more dreary hours running his fingers over the neck of a fiddle. His little finger would no more again feel the sharp cut of a taut steel-wire E-string!

He laughed out loud into the howling wind as he held up his hand and looked at it, the hand whose protection from injury had caused his mother to refuse to allow him to play baseball with the boys

in the vacant lot behind his house.

He had tried honestly, and he had not escaped from his mother's ambition unfairly. But he was free! Free! He shouted it over and over again into the wind.

It was funny, and he laughed at the joke of it. Bullets are made to kill, but bullets had given him life! And now that he had life he would use it. Except that there was little chance of his living to use it!

Suddenly he didn't want to die! It wasn't right that a man should die the day he was born. He would have none of that. Life was before him, life and freedom, and he was determined to live and to taste life.

He quickly checked his instruments, dug out his chart board and by the light of his flashlamp he checked his course to the nearest land. A difference in only a few degrees in navigation would mean the difference between life or death. He *had* to hit that Island of San Cristobal squarely on the nose! There wasn't enough gas to go any farther.

HE WAS glad now that he had accurately put down the data announced by the talker on the carrier. His knowledge was based on his confidence in the precision and teamwork of those on the carrier—and this confidence was born of rules and regulations, obeyed by all for the safety of all.

It all made sense now—clear, common sense!

Despite the menace of the black water beneath him, Michael Latimer felt a great elation, and he flew happily onward. A man was not fit to live until he knew how to die. Michael knew this now—and he was fit to live—determined to live!

Watching his gas, Michael flew two more hours, and then he knew that he

had missed San Cristobal Island. It would probably be another hundred miles to the nearest tip of Guadalcanal to the northwestward, or about the same distance northward to Malaita Island. But it would be impossible to reach either. Nor had he enough gas to fly until daylight arrived.

He watched the sea below him with greater care. The crests of the waves made faint pencilings of phosphorescence in parallel rows. Even in the dark, he would be able to recognize any land, for there would likely be a coral reef offshore, which would boil up the water into a greater glow, and on the shore, the wavecrest glow would vanish. Michael searched his mind for every story he had heard, for every word of advice he had received which might suggest some way out of his difficulty, but as he flew he never took his eyes off the water.

Company! So intense had been his watch beneath him, that he was almost upon the tail of the ship before he discovered it. But as he glanced up, he saw the twin blue flames of a two-motored ship flying ahead of him. Whether friend or enemy, the ship had not discovered him because he had come up on its tail, which was a blind spot for all but the largest bombers.

The bomber ahead of him was not flying straight, but was cutting a large, lazy arc. To keep from being discovered, Michael followed on the man's tail, turning with the bomber.

He picked up his transmitter, touched the radio button on his throttle, then halted. This was enemy water. It would be rash to try to contact the bomber on the slim chance that it was friendly. There were no friendly bombers supposed to be in this territory. He dropped his transmitter back on its hook, and searched the sky and water beneath him.

And then he knew! He saw that he

had fallen into a group of five bombers which were circling slowly. Instantly he suspected the meaning of this, and looked downward.

Down on the water, he saw the hooded glow of a small light, and he watched it as he kept his place in the lazy circle of bombers which followed one another around and around. He watched the tiny spot on the water.

Finally there was the blue exhaust which showed that the one below was taking off. As it sped in a straight line, and then climbed to join the circle under the overcast, one of the machines in the circle glided down to the water and left a fiery streak in its wake as it took the place of the other one at the light.

They were Japanese float-type bombers, being refueled by a submarine!

ON URGENT missions, this trick extended the patrol range of the big ships by hundreds of miles, and saved hours of time. With prearranged rendezvous for refueling at prearranged points, these big patrol ships could stay away from their bases as long as necessary to accomplish their tasks.

And right now the Japs had a task—to find and destroy the carrier, *Yellowjacket*!

Instantly a desperate scheme came to Michael, born complete with full details.

He dug into his flying suit and got out his Colt and stuck it into an outer pocket, took the papers off his chart board and stuffed them into his clothes along with his code book. Then he cut his motor to black out his exhaust flames, and went into a glide, nosing over toward the tiny light which he suspected to be on the conning tower of the submarine.

His ship glided down to within a

hundred feet of the water and leveled off, and as he passed over the submarine, he shoved the control lever of his dispersion bomb rack. Each carrier-based fighter had ten of these small highly-sensitive grenades under its wings. They would not sink the sub, but they were ordinarily used for the purpose of breaking up enemy flight formations. One of them could cripple a plane, or with a lucky blow, put it out of action. But this was not Michael's purpose.

He dropped the light bombs over the submarine, and saw the brilliant flashes of their charges as they exploded. The Jap sub commander did not wait for further attack, but crashed his sub while Michael was nosing up and turning it around again. By the time Michael was back over the seaplane, the sub was not in sight.

But Michael had been busy, too. Dark and silent, flying only on momentum, the Wildcat was settling fast as Michael brought it back over the floating seaplane. He was standing up in the seat of his ship, with the transparent hood shoved back.

Just as the ghost of his dark ship whistled over the floating seaplane, he jerked the ripcord ring of his chute, and the wind whipped the silk mushroom open and jerked him out into space.

And at the same moment, the frightened Jap bomber crew got their motors going, and the big seaplane bomber started slowly to taxiing.

Michael had his gun in his right hand, and his left hand on his parachute harness. The Japs hadn't yet closed the cowling over their seats, and Michael jerked his lanyards just enough to guide him into it, barely missing by inches. His feet caught under the rim of the Jap's cockpit cowling, and at the same instant he released his parachute harness and fell

into the laps of the two Jap pilots.

In the dim light he saw two yellow, goggled faces and two sets of horsey teeth in wide opened mouths. He did not wait to introduce himself. He blew their brains out with two quick shots! Michael Latimer shooting men like this! He was grinning, and he said, "Why *Mister* Latimer!" and threw them out to the sharks!

THE navigator stuck his yellow face up from the catwalk to the greenhouse, and Michael put his Colt to the man's forehead and blew the top of his head off.

The idling propellers were carrying the seaplane along slowly, and now Michael slipped into the pilot's seat under the wheel, and began feeling out the ship. He could not read the numerals on the dials, but the whole instrument panel looked familiar to him. He dropped his hand to where the two throttles should be, and they were there. He poured the coal to the engines, and the ship shot off.

So good had the Japs been at imitating American ships, that Michael found no trouble at all in identifying all the instruments and levers as he took off and circled to join the other five bombers hovering overhead. He took his place in the widest gap in the circle, and waited for the next move. He hoped and believed that he knew what it was.

There were six bombers in the air, five Japs and an American in a Jap plane. And they were all looking for the carrier Yellowjacket!

CHAPTER IV

MICHAEL had climbed and re-joined the circle, and now the leader flashed his running lights, and in the dim light of the dawn

which was breaking, he saw those ahead of him taking positions in single echelon formation, each plane dropping back to the right, rear, and above the one in front of it. Being the last ship in the formation, he followed into position just as though he were one of the Japs, with some hope of not being discovered for a while.

The squadron of bombers climbed steadily as it set out upon its death-dealing patrol. As they climbed past fourteen thousand feet, Michael found the oxygen tube and stuck it into his mouth. After the first sense of unusual alertness which the oxygen gave, he began to realize that the altitude was going to make trouble for him. For, while the Japs were used to flying together, he had to keep his wits about him to follow any lead they made and avoid discovery. This wouldn't be easy, now that his mental reactions were slowing up with the added altitude.

Added to which, his leg and arm were paining and getting stiff.

The squadron flew eastward as the sun broke out of the horizon, and every minute of the time made Michael more uneasy. For during the late hours of darkness, the breezes had blown away the low overcast, and had piled the high clouds into great white banks of clear fleece.

The ceiling was unlimited! There was no cloud protection for the carrier any more.

Michael reviewed the new conditions. The Japs could see the carrier long before the carrier would be able to see them. Of course, the carrier would have patrols in the air, but the patrols in turn would make it impossible for the listeners to identify enemy aircraft, since the listening devices would register both friend and enemy alike.

The Japs would have two choices—

either fatal to the Yellowjacket. They could spot the carrier, then stay out of sight of it and radio for help. But this would break radio silence and also warn the carrier. Again, they could climb and approach the ship for a bombing run, hoping that one set of bombs would hit the carrier in their suicidal mission. In such a case they would not break silence until they were discovered, then they would notify their base of the location—and dive to their deaths on the carrier if necessary.

Michael spent the next two hours climbing and examining the inside of the cockpit, identifying the bomb release levers, the gun loading levers, firing buttons and radio gear. And searching for a way out of his predicament.

Suddenly the number three ship of the echelon dived out of line and sped up to a point wing-to-wing with the leader!

Michael caught his breath as he knew what that meant. The man had seen something, and was reporting it to the squadron leader—without the aid of radio. They would keep silence, then!

Michael strained his eyes around the horizon. In the clear air, with not a low cloud in sight, the sea was beautiful and serene, as blue as a jewel, and apparently deserted. He searched the entire horizon with his naked eyes, then took a pair of binoculars out of a case under the instrument panel and looked.

THEN he saw it. Three tiny pinpoints of smoke on the horizon to the left! Three! That was his squadron, the carrier and the two destroyers moving under forced draft.

He examined the air above them, but he knew it was useless. The ships were certain to have a patrol out, but the planes were too small to be seen at this distance.

He felt the urge to break and head for the carrier. But that would do no good. If he did manage to escape these Japs who would in this way discover his presence, he would be shot down by his own men as he approached the carrier. And that would not save the carrier either.

And now the new Michael Latimer had one object in life—to save the carrier! It was his home, the home of his friends, and it was up to him to preserve it.

Forgotten were his wounds now.

The Jap leader turned southward from his position and flew until he was between the morning sun and the carrier, then he signaled with his wings again, and Michael followed the others as the echelon straightened out into a straight line of planes stairstepping upward from the leader. Thus those on the carrier would have the more difficulty looking into the sun and seeing them.

It was evident now the Jap leader was going to handle the job by himself, and take all the glory, even if he had to do a suicide dive on the carrier. Racing straight toward the smoke spots on the horizon, he would be in contact with the carrier force in a matter of moments.

Michael grabbed in his pocket for his code book, saw he didn't have the time to code a message. In a matter of seconds radio silence, or code either, would be useless. Voice would reach that far, and be quicker than Morse. He picked up the transmitter and pressed the radio generator button.

"Ensign Latimer to carrier," he barked, repeating each phrase. "Ensign Latimer—'Dogwood' (his personal identifying code word) to carrier. Six Jap bombers approaching you from bearing ninety degrees, at altitude nineteen thousand. Intercept."

He continued repeating his message

until his earphones brought the answer. "Carrier to Dogwood. Roger. Give your position, Dogwood."

"Dogwood to Carrier. I am in the sixth Jap bomber. They are approaching on a long glide. Will probably make their run at six thousand, speed two hundred fifteen and increasing. I will try to destroy as many as possible. That is all."

Michael dropped his transmitter, shoved his throttles forward and nosed his ship down toward the plane in front of him, and he thanked his stars that these light bombers did not have tail gunners.

He got to within close firing range of the bomber ahead of him, sighting through his rings, and his thumb on the gun button. He waited until he was almost on the man's tail, then his thumb jammed the button. His ship vibrated under the recoil of his four wing guns—but the bomber ahead of him disintegrated in midair, and a black puff of smoke took its place, a tiny cloud raining smouldering parts of the wreckage.

MICHAEL knew the Japs had heard him speaking, but there was a chance that none of them spoke English and would not know where the message came from. They would merely know that things had started.

He overcame the next bomber ahead of him, and knocked it down, a flaming comet in the brilliant sea, before the Japs ahead discovered that they had an enemy in their midst. Michael heard the Japanese chatter in his earphones, and saw the leader circle around out of formation to see what was the matter.

Michael showed him what was the matter! He jettisoned his two thousand pounds of bombs, thus adding miles of speed to his ship, and from his position above the leader, he dived on the man, his wing guns roaring, face glued to his sights and a grin glued to

his face.

Michael Latimer was using a heavy bomber for a fighting ship—and a heavy bomber equipped with awkward speed-retarding seaplane floats as well.

He got a side glimpse of the carrier group now as his Jap squadron approached it at over two hundred miles an hour. There was no sign of any planes being launched. And the Japs were eating up the miles between them! It couldn't last long. Fighters would hardly have time now to gain enough altitude to meet the bombers.

But Michael didn't have time to think of this now. With his lightened ship, he dived on the Jap leader with his guns blazing. He knew what was what, while the Jap was curious and puzzled. And for this reason, the Jap leader dived into the sea with a trail of black smoke behind him. He had got in one burst as the crushing weight of Michael's lead ripped his plane to pieces.

Michael banked the heavy bus on a wing and looked around to see what the other three Japs were going to make of it. He could hear their chattering in his earphones, but he could not understand what they were saying.

He took time for another glimpse down—toward the carrier—and his heart sank. Antiaircraft guns were already throwing up a barrage around the ships, and the air was filled with beautiful white and green puffballs of bursting shells—but *there were no American planes in the air!*

Hardly knowing what he was doing, he picked up his transmitter and shouted into it: "In God's name, what's the matter with you, carrier? I said you were being bombed. I can't shoot down the whole squad. Where are your fighters? For the love of—"

A very calm, restrained voice came into his ear. "Carrier to Dogwood. You will have to destroy the enemy

squadron alone. It is imperative that you do not allow them to succeed in reaching the carrier. That is all."

Benumbed, Michael answered weakly, "Dogwood to Carrier. Roger."

Michael saw that it was a matter of seconds now before the bombers would be in a position over the carrier. The Japs were utterly ignoring the anti-aircraft fire from the carrier and the destroyers, and it was evident that the three were taking no chances on missing. They were not preparing for a bombing run—they were preparing to dive on the ship!

Desperately, Michael dived his own ship under the others who had now formed into a tight Vee. He shoved his throttles full ahead and his ship, lighter than the others by the weight of his jettisoned bombs, screamed downward below the triad and upward squarely in front of their noses. He lifted one wing as he turned the heavy crate on a dime and came forward to meet them face to face—with all his guns blazing.

HE had one eye closed—the other was trained on the war heads of the bombs under the belly of the Jap leader's ship!

The Japs rode toward him as though he were merely a bump in the road which they did not bother to avoid. They opened their own guns, and the rain of lead was ripping Michael's wings to shreds. Their bullets whined like angry bees through his cockpit cowling, and hood. But Michael kept a steady foot on the rudder, and would not give ground.

Suddenly, pictured right in the ring-sight of his guns, Michael saw a blinding explosion, and then in a space of time too short to be counted, a second explosion, like a stuttering echo of the first one, split his eardrums.

He was looking right at it when it happened. It was amazing, horrible,

and yet beautiful. Where those three giant bombers had been there was one great puff of white cloud, and out of that cloud, which swelled with awful violence, there spurted whole motors, wing tips, tail assemblies—and what seemed to be small parts of human bodies. All were aflame with a searing white flame, and smoke trailed them like the bursting fragments of a skyrocket.

As far away from the explosion as he was, Michael felt it catch and lift his heavy ship right over on its back and leave it suspended there, while it almost jolted his own flesh off its bones. His ship hung suspended upside down in a queer, unnatural kind of stall as his momentum and the counter force of the explosion held him poised a full moment.

Then he fell off on a wing, and fought to right the ship. It was wabbly, and it responded sluggishly to the controls. The motor coughed, and would not run smoothly. He jiggled his supercharger control, and the gadget came off in his hand. The motor sputtered and died.

He looked around and saw the last of the wreckage of the three bombers raining down—on the deck of the carrier. He saw a sailing propeller hub, shining in the morning sun, revolve slowly as it arched downward, and bury itself deeply in the carrier's deck. But he had little time to keep looking.

His ship had been damaged too badly, and he had to leave it. Even as he was trying to persuade the motor to come to life again, he was donning one of the parachutes in the seats of the bomber. His controls were sloppy, and his ship wouldn't even glide to a landing.

He felt something flopping underneath the fuselage, and then free itself. He looked over the side and saw that one of his floats had been torn loose by the blast, and was now falling down

toward the deck of the carrier. Men on the ship below were running hurriedly to safety.

He buckled his parachute, stood up on the seat, then stepped back into the cockpit and with the aid of his gun pried out the Japanese clock on the instrument panel, and stuck it into his pocket. Then he climbed out of the ship and jumped.

When he landed on the deck of the Yellowjacket, his own crew chief was the first man to reach him. The old Chief Petty Officer said: "Thanks for the propeller hub, sir. I didn't expect you to drop it right at my feet. How are you, sir?"

Michael handed him the clock. "I'm all copasetic, Chief. All copasetic. Here's a clock to set in the propeller hub. But tell me, where were the rest of the plane crews? On a furlough?"

THE chief pointed to a work crew at the forward end of the deck, and Michael saw that there was a section of new planking being installed clear across the width of the ship. "One of those bombers you were after last night laid an egg on it," he explained. "We've been working on it all night, but we haven't been able to send a ship aloft, and won't be able to for another two hours. But there's a bunch of land based bombers coming out for an escort in a hour or so."

Then an unheard of thing came about at that moment. The captain of the ship—than whom a no more exclusive person lives, so far as an ensign is concerned—had come down to the deck to greet him personally.

The Old Man was weary with anxiety, and his face was seamed and grave. He held out his hand and showed that beneath all the heavy weight of his responsibility, and of gold braid on his cap and sleeves, there was a human being.

"I'm glad to see you back safely, Latimer. You've done a good job. You can see for yourself that we've been completely helpless, and would have been until we got land-based escort or repairs completed. If you hadn't destroyed those bombers we would have been—" he shrugged. "—well, we didn't stand a chance. Tell me, how did you accomplish it?"

Michael Latimer stood at attention, with one foot bare, one hand bloody, and though he didn't know it at the time, with a nose bloody and mashed flat by the explosion. He answered truthfully:

"I don't know, sir. I came up under the belly of the first ship, thinking I might be safer in that position—and suddenly they all blew up. I suspect that I hit the war head of one of their bombs, and the concussion exploded the rest of them."

"H-m," the captain said. "That has happened before, but accidentally. I suppose that you knew that, and used your knowledge to good advantage."

"No, sir. I had never heard of it before. But I believe that I will be able to learn things fast from now on."

"Good," the captain answered. "Go to the sick bay and get patched up and rest a while, and I will hear the rest of your report later. You've done a good job, Latimer, and we all thank you."

Mike Latimer saluted as the captain turned and left him. Then he looked at the stub of his missing little finger. "Yes," he said to himself. "I've done a good job. I should have hacked that finger off ten years ago—then everything would have been copasetic."

"Did you say something, sir?" the chief asked.

"Yeah. I said it's a great life, isn't it? I hope I don't get stuck down there in the sick bay. I don't want to miss anything from here on out."

YANK SKY-DEVILS IN AFRICA

by

ORLANDO RIGONI

Author of "Silver Wings for a Tough Kid," etc.

The crew sheet of the Musketeers' Consolidated B-24 bomber read like the line-up of a Notre Dame backfield, and those scrappy Yank sky-devils blasted the enemy to hellangone that way too!



As the Messy zoomed for another try, Frank plowed a hole in its guts!

CHAPTER I

SKY-HELLIONS

THE Melting-pot Musketeers, they called themselves, but Wing Headquarters in Cairo called them anything but angels. As Major

Honey Johnson said:

"The crew sheet of that damned ship reads like the lineup of a Notre Dame football team!"

The newspaper correspondents complained that any news involving the crew of the Consolidated B-24 bomber sounded like a report on the League of

Nations. However, they all agreed that if there was a job to be done, the crew of Number Ten usually succeeded in doing it thoroughly.

That night when Major Honey Johnson called the crews of Bomber Squadron 194 into the briefing room of their base in northern Egypt, the Melting-pot Musketees sat grouped together as usual.

There was First Lieutenant Jim Fennell, pilot and boss, who was easy on his men in a tough way. His round Irish mug usually had a grin on it, but just in case his orders were disobeyed he kept his fists clenched.

There was his co-pilot, Happy Diggin, with a face like a pall-bearer and a wit like carbolic acid. "Bet he drinks embalming fluid when he wants to get stiff," was the general comment, and yet every man knew that Diggin would sacrifice his life for any one of them. There was Frank Ferugia, the navigator, who could out-muscle Mussolini, and Bill Salas, called owl-eyes, the bombardier.

THERE were gunners Johnny Moko, Jim Harasta (whom the Musketees sometimes kidded by calling him Hirohito), Howard Cook, Hans Meinhaus (Hitler take note) and the crew chief Fiegenbaum.

There were ten B-24s in the 194th and when the men were all settled, Major Johnson had the doors locked. Then he addressed them with a grim determination, and his voice, which was anything but honey, growled like a rusty hinge as he told them:

"This mission is of the utmost importance, and though I can't explain the strategy of the attack, it must succeed. Only your Squadron Leader, Captain Banks, and his assistant from the British headquarters in Alexandria, know the exact location of the objective. That is important so that if one

plane is forced down, the course of the other planes will remain a secret. Radio silence must be maintained at all costs and if a plane gets separated from the flight it must return to this base. I might add that the trip will require the full cruising capacity of your planes so your gasoline must be accordingly conserved. Now I'd like to have another check on the crews."

Jim Fennell looked back over his crew with which he had worked for so long that they had all become of one mind and will, and turned back to drone:

"Number Ten crew all present or accounted for. . . ."

Soon there was the confusion of preparation for departure and Fennell waited for his men to file past him. As he stepped outside, an orderly saluted in the dim, blue light of the barracks lamp and said:

"There's a call for Gunner Hans Meinhaus at the lounge, sir. Someone calling about his brother—something serious from what I gather."

Fennell called Meinhaus over and told him to get a run on and report directly to the bomber after completing his call. Then Fennell followed the others out to the line of B-24s which crouched in the Egyptian night like slumbering hawks.

Fennell, usually calm, felt a slow feeling of excitement grip him at the prospects ahead, for though the Musketees had raided Axis shipping in the Mediterranean and made one short raid on Crete, they had as yet had no serious battles with the enemy. This long raid promised more solid excitement and danger than they had previously experienced.

The only objection Fennell had to being pilot of the crew was that it prevented his using a gun. Sometimes he wished he could be an all around man like the crew chief, who could double

for any man on the plane.

The crews piled into the ten ships, and the Musketeers plane was the last on the line. The planes were revving up their four Wasp 1200s and taking off by the time Hans Meinhaus came running from the buildings with his goggles and chinstrap in place.

Hans crawled into the ship, waved at Fennell and then scrambled for his position in the tail turret. Soon after the B-34 shuddered into the sky and was lost in the wild blackness before dawn. Not until the formation was roaring out over the water did Fennell think of Hans Meinhaus again and then he wondered what the message had been. Ordinarily Meinhaus would not have had his goggles down or his chin strap buckled and the only reason Fennell could think of which would cause him to do that now, was that it would hide the emotions of his heavy-featured face.

FENNELL realized, too, how bad news just before a flight could cause a man to lose his nerve. He had been in a similar spot before and knew how shocked nerves might cause a man to forget himself.

Fennell had been in the war almost from the start for his eight hundred solo hours had easily won him a place in the R.A.F. despite the fact that he was on the edge of the age limit for fighter pilots. He had buddied up with another Yank by name of Sheffield and they had cut a wide swathe through the air until the day Sheffield was killed.

Sheffield had died in such a vicious, inhuman way that Fennell had had a hard time forgetting it. Three Krauts had killed him by inches, and though Fennell had been wounded five times trying to save him, Sheffield had been forced down on fire.

He had managed to land his ship, and Fennell had landed nearby, but

Sheffield's Spitfire had been burning so fiercely even Fennell could never have reached him had he not been wounded. Wounded as he was, Fennell had watched Sheffield squirm and die in the blaze and it had left scar on Fennell's mind.

Discharged from the hospital, Fennell had found himself unable to keep up the deadly pace of the fighters. In every clutch he would see the charred and bloody vision of Sheffield swim across his sights and they had finally ordered him back home for a period of convalescence. Fennell had recognized this as a polite brush-off and when the United States was looking for pilots, he played safe and signed up with the Bomber Command.

He had become an ace on his new job, but he still remembered those deadly minutes in the fighters, and now, hoping to bolster up Hans Meinhaus' feelings, he spoke over the intercom.

"Bad news, Hans?" he asked bluntly.

Hans' voice came back muffled, low. Hans had been born in America as had his father before him but he had lived among Germans in Wisconsin all of his life and still had a rather thick voice.

"Not very good news, skipper," Hans growled back.

"Buck up, buddy," Fennell encouraged. "Did somebody die?" Fennell believed it helped to talk about such things.

"Yah—my brother with the Ferry Command. Had a crack-up . . ."

"Tough luck."

The navigator just behind Fennell nudged him in the back. Frank Ferugia had a dark, olive complexion and he seldom spoke. When he did, he had something to say.

"You're drifting too far west, Skipper," he warned. "Better rev up the port engines . . ."

Fennell felt the control column jerk in his fist and he cursed softly. "The

engines are revving up properly," he snapped back, and suddenly he felt the controls whip savagely in his hand. He tried to bring them back on course just as Gunner Cook in the top turret cried over the intercom:

"Something's wrong with the rear end! Better get Fiegenbaum to go back and give a look!"

CHAPTER II

PLANT

AFTER the last B-24 had gone, Major Honey Johnson went back to "ops" for the latest reports, and from there he started toward his own quarters for another hour's sleep before dawn. However, before he had gone ten steps from the darkened operations hut, Sergeant Little, in charge of the tool room, caught up with him and grabbed his arm.

There was something so urgent in Little's manner that Johnson's lean six-foot-two stiffened like a pole.

"What is it, Sergeant?" he snapped impatiently. He could think of nothing important. Ops had reported everything quiet and the L.P. had phoned in that the sound of the B-24's was dying out fast.

"It's Gunner Hans Meinhaus, sir . . ."

"What about him?"

"He's dead!"

"Dead?"

"It's not very lovely, sir. Scotty found his body outside the rear door. He had just been in telephoning. He never had a chance from the looks of things."

"But I saw Meinhaus running out to his ship," Honey Johnson insisted, and added, "Come on, man, let's have a look at this!"

It wasn't a lovely sight for Hans Meinhaus' head had almost been severed from his shoulders with a sharp knife. The knife lay mate and bloody in the sand near him and Scotty, an R.A.F. pilot stationed with the Yank interceptors at the drome as an adviser, stared at it.

"I donna ken how't could make a man so die free grief. Bad new t'was he had, sor, and it fair broke . . ."

"If you mean he committed suicide, Scotty, you're crazy." Honey Martin barked at the shaggy Scot. "He's been stripped of his teddies and his chute."

"And his goggles are gone," Sergeant Little added. "Hans wore them because once his turret was shot open and he couldn't see for wind."

"Take him away," Major Johnson told Little, and keep this as mum as you can. "There's something afoot and we've got no time to lose. You come with me, Scotty."

In the privacy of his own quarters, Major called the hangers and told them to have Scotty's P-51 ready to go immediately.

"She's cold," came the response.

"Then have something hot for him!"

"Aye, sor, and I kinna gang see free in the 51. What is it ye'll be havin' . . ."

"Listen close, Scotty," Major Johnson said desperately. "We know that Cairo's full of Fifth Columnists, and intrigue. They've planted something on Jim Fennell's plane and it's up to us to warn him . . ."

"The radio . . ."

"That's out. There's too much danger of beaming the enemy onto the whole formation of B-24's. Those ships are valuable and so are the men in them. Take an electric torch and push your plane to the limit. You should have a hundred and fifty mile advantage in speed as the 24's will be cruising. If you get too far out to make the

return trip with your spare petrol, you'd better try to get down on the coast of Syria. Keep in hiding until we send you some additional fuel. Good luck!"

"I'm to warn them, is that is, seq?"

"Flash them to investigate their rear gunner, and I hope to God you're not too late."

AS LUCK would have it Scotty found a P-38 with an auxiliary tank waiting for him on the line. This ship should have a range of twelve hundred miles with the auxiliary tanks. He climbed into the nacelle swung between the engine booms, and gunned the Allison to a roar of thunder. The next instant he was whining up into the air.

Major Johnson had given him the bearings he must follow and he settled down to the mad race to overtake the swift bombers. He had covered seven hundred miles, when he was suddenly aware of a black shadow high above him. He gritted his teeth and shoved go-groose to the Allison.

He kept looking about carefully, and though it was too dark below him to see anything, he could easily detect any form which might be outlined against the lighter black of the sky. When he looked up again he thought he might have been dreaming, for the shape was gone.

Soon, however, the moon came up, and Scotty was suddenly aware that not only were there planes above him, two of them, but also on either side. He was pocketed by the planes and his mind worked swiftly.

The German fighters which he easily recognized by their silhouette as Messerschmitts 109R, the latest model, must have risen out of Syria though there were supposed to be no belligerent planes in that country. The Germans must have missed the bombers, and Scotty realized that they didn't

attack him because they believed he would lead them to the bombers.

He was caught between two mill-stones. If he failed to reach Jim Fennell's ship it might be sabotaged in the air; if he continued on he would lead the Germans to the bombers. He tried to think of some out and looked longingly at his radio yet he dared not use it. The next moment his problem had solved itself, for he found himself flying over a B-24 which had become detached from the rest of the bomber flight!

CHAPTER III

STAND BY THE DEAD

IN THE meantime, on getting Cook's warning, Jim Fennell turned to the co-pilot, Happy Diggin, and snapped:

"Take over, Happy. I'm going to have a look-see on my own. Get Fiegenbaum to give you a hand on the readings."

Jim Fennell slid out of his bucket and crouched on his short legs as he wormed his way back through the cabin. He got by the navigation table and through the bay. Just as he reached the place where Cook's legs dangled from the saddle of the top gun turret, the B-24 gave a final lurch which almost upset him. A puff of smoke came from the tail turret and the next moment he was staring at a madman with a gun!

With a shock Fennell realized the man wasn't Hans Meinhause though he had taken Meinhause' place. Now that his goggles were pushed up and his chin strap loose, Fennell could see that his face was fleshy, ugly, and sly. He must have been a spy from one of the nests in Calro.

"Get back, you verdammte schwein-bundel!" the man growled as he edged toward the escape hatch.

Fennell made a lunge for him but missed. The man fired as Fennell bored in and Fennell felt a sharp pain in his right side. He caught his breath and bracing himself against the duckboards, he snatched again for the man's gun. But the German was too fast for him, and fired again so close it seemed he must have torn a hole in Fennell's head.

Fennell's earphone deflected the bullet, and he dragged out his own gun but he was too late. The wind howled through the escape hatch as the German slid out. Fennell felt the blood running down his side but in the excitement he couldn't feel pain. He got the escape hatch shut and felt Fiegenbaum plucking at his sleeve.

"Look, Skipper—out there!"

Fennell looked out and saw a P-38 whining down alongside the B-24 and he thought he must be seeing a ghost. The next minute a light flashed in the cockpit of the P-38 warning him of the German spy on board his plane.

"Dammit, he got away!" Fennell cried bitterly. He began to suspect that his mission was going to be a failure. The Consolidated was now veering badly. "Happy's having trouble with the controls. Go forward and give him a hand, Fiegenbaum," Fennell ordered. "I want to have a look at this rear blister myself!"

Fiegenbaum staggered back through the wildly plunging plane and Fennell shoved his stocky body into the rear turret. He looked about swiftly, expecting to find some sort of a bomb planted there, but instead he found the turret glass broken.

Dawn was breaking by now, and in the muggy light he could see that the left rudder of the B-24, and the slipper hinge near it had been smashed by a

grenade. The stabilizer, too, had been shattered making control of the ship difficult.

He was about to turn back into the ship when he saw the Messys diving for him! A low growl rippled in his chest and his thick hands grabbed the gun handles. He plugged in his talker, and yelled at Happy Diggins:

"Veer in toward land and try to keep her up! Hell's crawling over us. Gunners do your damndest!"

EVEN before the order was given Jimmy Harasta was blazing away on the port side and Cook was spilling lead from the top turret. Fennell saw a Messerschmitt whip about sharply and come straight for him!

For a moment he couldn't believe his good fortune. He had a gun in his hands! The next instant that gun was snarling out a flood of capes which caught the Messy full on the nose. The Messy was doing it's share of shooting, too, and bullets plucked at Fennell's clothes. He heard them smash into the braces behind him and smelled the acrid odor of magnesium as the tracers filled the turret!

The next moment the Messy was going down with smoke pouring from the D.B. engine. Fennell shook the blood from his hand and discovering that the bomber was out of control, he turned and groped his way toward the control pit. He stumbled over something on the duckboards and reaching down, he discovered Cook lying there apparently dead.

A choked feeling filled Fennell's throat and he rushed up to his position in control of the ship sending Fiegenbaum back to take over Cook's gun.

Happy Diggins, his face a little gray about the mouth, looked across at him and growled, "This damned parrot won't settle down."

"She's crippled," Fennell retorted.

as he plugged in the phones. At that time he heard a thin scream over the inter-com.

"They've got me, damn 'em!" Johnny Mocko gasped.

"Johnny—Johnny!" Fennell barked but there was no answer.

Fiengenbaum's voice came through next, complaining, "Hold this poppoe steady, skipper! There's a Nazi louse boring in from the side!"

But Fennell couldn't steady the B-24. He tried controlling it by the motors and though he was far off his course, he made no effort to get back on. He must keep the Germans away from the other bombers, therefore his only hope was to turn back for his home base.

Lieutenant Salas, his voice as steady as his sharp eyes and big body, called from the bombardier's compartment, "What about the apples?"

"Keep the pins in and we'll save them if we can," Fennell snapped fighting the controls.

It was quite light outside by now and a Messy came for the port side with its guns blazing. The B-24 was pitching so badly that Fiengenbaum couldn't get a bead on the Nazi but the next moment a flurry of bullets pushed Fiengenbaum back from the gun and seemed to push him to the floor where he sat ramming his fist against his bleeding side.

Frank Ferugia, useless for the time being at the navigation table, leaped over and grabbed the gun. As the German zoomed for another try, Frank plowed a hole in his guts and the Messy twisted down out of control.

Jim Fennell didn't wait for any more fireworks. They had drifted inland and now he nosed the B-24 over and headed down for the black sands of Arabia. The ship had a tendency to twist around as it dived but he fought it with the throttles.

The fighters came after him for the first ten thousand feet, and bullets whanged through the cabin, thugged into the gasoline tanks, pinged into the dural braces. Frank Ferugia tried to turn Fiengenbaum over to see what was the matter with him, but he was already dead.

SUDDENLY Fennell saw the P-38 diving out of a cloud with its guns giving all they had. Scotty was still in there pitching, and he wasn't throwing all balls, either. He cut the tail off one Messy and then Scotty got his. With two Messys left, Scotty took a belly full of lead which sent a sheet of flame roaring back over the P-38.

But Scotty wasn't to be caught like that. He dived through the twin booms and didn't open his chute until he was in the mist a thousand feet from the ground.

The bomber hit the mist too, which seemed to be a cloud of dust whipped from the arid country below. Fennell fought the B-24 but felt it get more and more out of control.

Happy Diggins growled, his black eyes glowing like marbles, "She's bustin' up, Skipper—look at the left wing—the engine. . . ."

The outside engine on the left side was vibrating badly; if it pulled loose half the wing would go with it. Fennell knew that, but he knew, also, that he had wounded men on board, and dead men. If he abandoned the ship, the wounded must die. There was still a chance to set her down for even though they were coming down in the mountains he could find many places for a landing.

"We've got to stand by the dead," he said fiercely, and then calling Bill Salas over the inter-com, he asked him to crawl forward and see how Johnny Mocko was lying, and prepare him for a rough landing.

He swung the B-24 at the last moment and lined it for a road which ran alongside a ledge. Ahead of them loomed some high mountains and on either side of the road were some giant cedar trees.

Grimly Fennell gunned the motors, risking the loss of the outside engine. The engine held and the burst of power steadied the big ship. Fennell kicked the wheels out but the front wheel refused to give. The oleo gear was jammed, so Fennell eased the big wheels out part way, then set the air-brakes hard and stood the B-24 on her tail as he skidded to earth in a cloud of dust.

For a moment he sat there numbed. He wasn't conscious of any elation at being alive, for he knew that behind him were dead and wounded men. He realized that his plane was badly wrecked and it had all been caused by the German who had taken Hans Meinhart's place on the flight.

What had become of that German? Stemming his fury, Fennell got out of the bucket seat and went back to examine Cook. Cook wasn't dead but he had a bad head wound. Fennell asked Diggins to get Cook outside while he went forward and gave Bill Salas a hand with Johnny Mocko. Fennell became aware of his own wounds as he exerted himself, but they were slight in comparison with the others.

When they were all outside Fennell took stock of the situation. Frank Ferugia had a bad wound in his leg, but he could walk as the bone hadn't been shattered. Blood ran down Cook's face from his head wound. Johnny Mocko was unconscious. Fliegenbaum was dead. Bill Salas, Happy Diggins, and Jimmy Harasta had escaped injury.

"It looks like the Melting-pot Musketeers got a little too close to

hell," he muttered and shook his big fist at the sky.

Happy Diggins, despite his funeral face, had a heart the size of the world and he set about the task of caring for the wounded as best he could.

FRANK FERUGIA refused to be treated. "I can see some stone butts up around that head," he insisted. "I'm going to find out where we are."

"Better let me handle it, Frank," Fennell warned. "Even in this wilderness they might know something about international law and try to intern us for the duration. If we're careful we might get away again without being stranded. I've got a hunch the Germans forced us down here for a purpose."

"What would they want?"

"Our secret bomb sight for one thing. We've got to protect that with our life. We've got to save the bombs, too. Might need them before we get out of this tangle."

He set Salas to work removing the bombight, and despite their wounds, he and Frank tried to remove the bombs but they proved too heavy for them to carry very far. He told Salas to bury the bombight behind some rocks and then he decided to go ahead and look for the town.

They had landed in such a wild, billy country, that Fennell felt sure the backward natives would not try to hold them, but might, on the other hand, give them some help. He had just started up the road when he stopped dead in his tracks. Coming around the bend of the road ahead of him was a girl herding six goats!

She stared at them like a frightened fawn, and yet she didn't try to run away. She wore a bright cloth about her dark head, and a long, loose robe fell almost to her feet. Her back was straight, her head proud, and there was

curiosity, more than fear in her eyes. "Hello—lailtak saeedee," he greeted in Arabic.

In fairly good English the girl replied, "I thought you had landed far across the valley. You are faranchee, no?"

"Yes," Fennell nodded, "we're foreigners. The men of your city must have heard us land. Why have they not come to see if we need help?"

"Because," she said bitterly, "the last time a plane landed here, and the men of my city came to offer help, they were shot at and two of them killed. That's why they have not come, and if you should try to enter the town, they will kill you."

Fennell frowned and walked close to her. She didn't draw away from him but rather defied him to touch her.

"What is your name?" Fennell asked.

"Talla."

"My friends are badly injured in battle. We must have some help. Surely if you take me into the city my life will be spared?"

"Aywa," she nodded reverting to the Arabic, "taala hena—come with me."

Fennell went with her, and not far around the bend in the road they came into the town built in a little hollow around a spring and the stone and mud houses with their rolled mud roofs seemed a very definite part of the earth itself.

THERE were no formal streets and upon a rise at one side of the town stood a larger building which she informed him was the mission in which she had learned English and German. Then she led him to a stone house and bid him shed his shoes.

This he accomplished after some delay, for the custom hadn't been made for laced boots, or vice versa. As he

removed his shoes she explained that the city was that of Bhamdoon and was governed by a Sheik Haffiz Zubbat.

"He is a strange man," she finished, "but we must obey him."

They entered the house and the rising sun cast weird shadows ahead of them as they stood in the doorway. The girl's family was seated crosslegged on the floor having their morning meal of lentil, sour milk pudding and gkebis. They rose solemnly at the sight of Fennell and the girl explained why he was there.

Apprehensive glances went about the group and the old man with the gray, shredded beard, bowed slightly and outlined against the open fire behind him, he looked majestic despite his bundling clothes and unwashed appearance.

"Lailtak Saeedee," he greeted.

Fennell, impatient of the delay, nodded and explained that he wanted help, but the old man shrugged and replied:

"M'abaraf—I don't understand?"

Talla explained, "You must first sit and eat with us. It is the custom."

Realizing that these natives were already apprehensive of faranchees who came in airplanes, he decided to humor them until he could learn definitely of his location. He was forced to sit down first on the dirt floor and then the others followed suit, all except one small boy whom the old man called aside and sent on some errand.

Fennell attacked the native food heroically, but the gkebis defied him. It is a flat, unleavened bread baked in discs eighteen inches in diameter with the consistency of shoe leather.

To his questions as to where he was, and to what country the village belonged, he was told:

"Maybe Syria — maybe Turkey. There is no definite borderline here. When the tax collectors come . . ." the

old man shrugged and said nothing more.

Fennell became impatient for his men needed attention and he explained this as best he could. Talla repeated his requests, and as the others argued the door opened and in came Shiek Haffiz Zubbat. They all stood up, and Fennell did likewise.

The sheik had fierce, cunning eyes and his dirty-brown beard seemed to stand out from his face like quills. He bowed to Fennell when he was introduced to him and there ensued a long harangue between the sheik and Talla's father.

Fennell began to suspect that the sheik was there for no good purpose and remembering Talla's warning that the village had been attacked once before, he asked her why the men were arguing.

"The sheik insists you must meet Herr Oberlitz, the missionary from the school. My father refuses to allow the missionary in the house because he was friendly with the men in the plane which attacked us that other time."

BUT the sheik won the argument for he went to the door and opened it. Fennell tensed as he saw the missionary for he was a man of powerful build, with a military bearing, and even without an official uniform one could see that he was more a man of the sword than a man of God.

"I am delighted to make the acquaintance of this American," Herr Oberlitz bowed. "I shall be glad to offer him the hospitality of my school—or of my experimental station."

The inflection of the last statement puzzled Fennell. He bowed slightly, and then because he suspected this German, he made a bold statement.

"Why did your German friends kill these people? Did you wish to terrify them into obeying you?"

The German's face flushed red and his eyes became sparks under his hooded brows. His flat nose twitched as he tried to control himself and his pudgy hand slid into the pocket of his coat where could be seen the unmistakable outlines of a gun.

"I'm not here to answer impertinent questions," Herr Oberlitz snapped. "I wish you to meet some friends of mine."

As he said this he nodded at the sheik who stepped forward and quickly searched Fennell, taking away his gun.

Fennell felt a rush of anger creep up to his blond hair, and he said very fiercely:

"Before we start playing cops and robbers, I've got some badly wounded men lying near the wreck of my plane. We were forced down. . . ."

The German smiled and it was evident that he had no thought of keeping up pretenses.

"We forced that landing, mein freund. We hardly expected it to be made so very convenient for us, however.

"Come—your friends are being taken care of."

"You'd better go with him," Talla whispered, and her slim hand squeezed Fennell's arm.

If her action was a signal he failed to understand it. He rose stiffly and walked to the door.

As he reached the door, Fennell spun around hoping to catch Herr Oberlitz off guard and overcome him. Fennell drew his fist back, but the blow was never completed for the sheik stepped up like a cat and pressed the point of his gold khangar dagger against his side.

"You are two inches from death, faranchee," he said crisply.

Then he added quite harshly, "Even some Syrians have no love for the British or her allies."

CHAPTER IV

BAD BARGAIN

FUMING at the turn of events and yet realizing the futility of courting certain death, Fennell trudged back down the road to the damaged plane. He began to understand that he had been trapped into some deep plan of intrigue the details of which he must learn if he hoped to destroy the Germans' efforts.

Could it be that the Germans had planned to capture one of the B-24s intact for use in some deadly scheme of their own? He could readily see the advantage of having such a ship for an attack upon the nerve center of the Suez Canal or the main harbor defenses of Alexandria.

He was thankful for one thing and that was that the bomb sight had been buried. He had hoped to save the bombs for they would have been useful in blasting their way out of a trap.

They made the turn in the road and approached the bomber, and there Fennell saw two motor trucks without any insignia upon them and a dozen men dressed in the uniform of Glubb Pasha's army. He soon discovered the men to be Germans, however, and they were taking charge of the wounded and the prisoners with characteristic Teuton efficiency.

Happy Diggins and Bill Salas were handcuffed to one of the trucks. Salas had a blue bruise on the side of his face where the butt of a gun had clubbed him. Harasta had a cut on his arm from a bayonet.

Diggins growled. "We didn't have much chance, skipper . . ."

"Maybe it's a good thing," Fennell soothed him.

The Germans were dragging the bomber into the trees at one side of the

road where it would be out of sight. It was a simple matter to move it with the aid of one of the trucks. The bombs were still in the racks of the B-24 and somehow this impressed Fennell as a sign that the Germans meant to use them in the future. He was noticing, however, that the wounded were being carefully treated, and he was thankful for that.

Suddenly, he was confronted by a German officer in the native uniform, who glared at him with unconcealed hate in his piggish eyes. The officer had a brush mustache, and in addition to a German Luger on his hip, he carried a native dagger. Fennell had heard one of the men call him Oberst Von Shautze.

Von Shautze drew up his slim form like a rapier and snapped, "Wie geht's, Amerikaner. I'm sorry you must be put to such inconvenience."

Fennell didn't try to conceal his anger. "Like hell you are, Dutcher. You'd be a damned sight sorrier if we had got away."

The German shrugged. "Perhaps. However your treatment will be in accordance with your cooperation. You understand, of course, that you have landed in neutral territory and must be interned."

Fennell grinned and snorted, "Pretty slick. And by what government are we being interned?"

"What difference does it make? We are confiscating your plane. Do you have any objections?"

"Would they do any good?"

"Of course not, but then we want to give you every liberty. Isn't that how you do it in your country? What you call it—freedom of speech, nicht wahr?"

"I hope it blows up and takes you with it," Happy Diggins put in sourly.

"One thing more," the German said sharply, "where is the bomb sight?"

"We don't use one—we're getting good," Fennell retorted.

"Lieber Gott! Ist's denn ein Esel? We don't like back talk from prisoners, mein freund."

"We're not your friends, and to hell with you," Frank Ferugia said from where he was sitting with his bandaged leg sticking out before him.

THE German struck Frank across the face with his open hand, and when Frank tried to get up and strike back, Fennell grabbed him and pushed him down.

"Don't give them any excuses for attacking us."

"The bomb sight?" the German inquired coldly.

"We didn't have any," Fennell replied quietly.

The German turned on Fennell savagely and made to strike him across the face, but Fennell, in spite of his advice to Frank Ferugia, grabbed the German's arm, and twisting quickly he hurled the man over his shoulder and deposited him against the truck's back wheels.

Oberst Von Shautze crouched to his knees and the Luger glinted in his hand, but before he could fire, the missionary, Herr Oberlitz, stepped in front of him, and snarled:

"Ruhig, dumkopf!" Oberlitz' tone of authority convinced Fennell that he was above the colonel in rank though he pretended to be a missionary. "We must take them to the experimental station," Oberlitz went on. "We cannot trust everybody in Bhamdoon."

Fennell saw Talla coming down the road with her goats, and as she turned off, he believed she was trying to signal them. He could make nothing of the signal, however, other than a sign of friendship.

Von Shautze rose and brushed himself off. He went to the crew of the

truck which had pulled the bomber off the road. They appeared to be a travelling repair crew, and he spoke with them for sometime, motioning continually at the bomber as he talked.

Then he returned and ordered the wounded men and the prisoners aboard the second truck. Then, leaving behind a detail to handle the burial of Fiegenbaum, the truck set off through the trees.

Grimly, Fennell looked at the wounded men, fearful that the rough going might prove fatal, but the Germans had slung the stretchers carefully across the truck in order to lessen the shock. It was apparent that the Germans had use for the wounded men, otherwise they would never have bothered about them.

Johnny Mocko was still unconscious, and Howard Cook was in too much pain to talk. Fennell felt the ache of his own side but refused to ask for treatment.

They bumped along without a road, until suddenly where the cedars were thickest, they found a road and followed it between two cliffs. It dipped suddenly, and after two miles of hair-pin turns, it ended in a small valley which seemed cut off from the outside world.

"Well I'll be damned—look at that!" Fennell gasped. "Some fancy headquarters."

Herr Oberlitz, who overheard the exclamation, smiled coldly, and explained, "Just one of our way stations on our future road to India, mein Herr."

THERE was a hangar the color of the sand, several cottages and an office building. Then along one side was a long, stone warehouse which served, also, as an excellent prison. Fennell, Harasta and Salas were turned into the stone building which had small vents for windows, and Happy Diggins

was forced to carry a bucket of water for the four of them to wash up in.

Fennell washed his wounded side and was pleased to find the bleeding stopped. When they had dried themselves, they were brought a welcome but unsatisfactory meal of soup and gkebis. Even soaking the native bread in the broth did little good.

"Make damned fine shoes," Happy growled as he chewed on the rubbery stuff.

The wounded men had been taken to the infirmary behind the cottages, and when he had finished eating, Fennell climbed on a box and tried to see if he could communicate with them through the vents in the wall.

But a casual glance at the field proved the impossibility of this. Fennell could see some of Germany's finest fighter planes on the field and he could see, also, an old Dornier carrying the insignia of the Turkish Airlines. It was evidently an old passenger plane and might have once been used for commercial purposes.

Then Fennell heard a scream from the infirmary which made his blood run cold.

"For God's sake—it's Cook!" he gasped.

If he had been at the infirmary he would have gone completely mad for what was transpiring there only an insane man could have withstood.

Von Shautze was leaning over Howard Cook's bed, and behind him was a doctor with stimulants to make sure the patient didn't completely lose consciousness. Near the door stood Herr Oberlitz, and at the foot of Frank Ferugia's bed was stationed a guard with a drawn gun just in case Frank might lose his common sense and try to attack them.

"We are trying to cure your wounds, mein freund," Von Shautze purred savagely, "but we have very little anti-

septic to spare. However if you will tell us where the bomb sight is . . ."

Cook, his quiet face flushed with fever and his curly hair red with blood, gritted, "Go to hell!"

Then Von Shautze dropped some acid in the open wound! Cook couldn't restrain the savage cry of pain which tore from his dry lips.

"I am sorry, but this will cauterize it. The bomber is no good to us without the bombsight. Where is it?"

Cook tore the bedclothes with his fingers but said nothing. Again the acid tortured him. Sweat poured off his face and though Shautze's voice rose to a scream of frenzy, Cook remained silent.

Frank Ferugia, menaced by the gun, watched the hellish drama, his own forehead beaded with perspiration. He gritted his teeth and tried to give Cook some of his strength for he knew the danger lay in Cook unconsciously telling the truth while he was passing out.

COOK did pass out and all the ministrations of the doctor who tried to prevent it were of no avail.

"He is human, Herr Oberst," the doctor said, displeased with the savage performance.

Even Herr Oberlitz, good Nazi as he was, had no stomach for such hellish tricks. "You are indeed a fine butcher, Von Shautze," Oberlitz smiled without feeling, "Himmler picks his killers well."

"We must be strong!" Von Shautze informed them gruffly.

In the meantime, two attendants had managed to bring Johnny Mocko to life with the aid of stimulants, and he was singled out to be questioned next. Johnny's face was flushed and his dark hair drooped into his eyes. He looked about him evidently puzzled by his surroundings and Frank, afraid Johnny might answer their barked questions before

he was aware of his surroundings, cried:

"Don't talk, Johnny! The German dogs . . ."

"Ruhig — v e r d a m m t s c h w e i n!" Shautze roared.

Johnny tried to sit up, but the stiff bandages about his body prevented it.

"Slit the bandages open," Von Shautze ordered.

The doctor did so reluctantly to expose a horrible wound in Johnny Mocko's stomach.

"No—let me go—give me my guns . . ." Johnny gasped, not yet able to realize where he was.

"First answer me a question," Von Shautze inquired softly, hoping to catch the Yank off guard, "where is the bomb sight?"

"No, Johnny, don't tell them!" Frank Ferugia cried. "That's one question none of us must answer."

Von Shautze turned on Frank with evil burning in his eyes. "You shall have your chance to refuse to answer it, mein Herr. For now, shut up!"

Johnny Mocko caught on, and when Von Shautze turned back to him, he was stiff and silent. Von Shautze noticed this change in the badly wounded man and realized it meant defiance.

"You have a bad wound, mein Herr. It should be cauterized—with fire. What would you give for a shot of morphine before the operation takes place?"

"Nothing," Johnny hissed.

"I see by your papers you are a Chetnik, Herr Mocko. You are a traitor to your country, coming here in an Amerikaner uniform. If you will help us."

"No," Mocko said fiercely. "I am an American and I'll see you in hell before I tell you anything. It would do no good to say I knew nothing of the bomb sight . . ."

"No good whatever. I regret the operation must proceed but if you change your mind during the perform-

ance you might let us know. The hot irons, Herr Doktor—schnell!"

A German feldwebel stepped forward with a blowtorch which had been brought from the repair rack near the hangar and in which an ordinary soldering iron was heating. The Herr Doktor granted Von Shautze the honor of performing the hellish operation.

VON SHAUTZE glared at the Herr Doktor as though he would plunge the hot iron into his face for the Herr Doktor's action had as much as said, "You are the arch fiend . . ."

Von Shautze picked up the iron and turned with his slim body crouched forward like that of a witch. Even Von Shautze had emotions and perspiration dripped off his brush mustache. He looked for a moment at Mocko's face, but Johnny kept his eyes shut.

The glowing iron made a dull glow across Johnny Mocko's body as it neared the wound. Suddenly Von Shautze touched it to the ragged flesh. Johnny didn't cry out—he didn't even feel it for he had lapsed into unconsciousness just as the heat neared the wound.

"Good God!" Frank Ferugia cried and threw himself off his bed, but the butt of the guard's gun knocked him down and he was forced back in place.

Herr Oberlitz hissed, "Your zeal is defeating you, Herr Oberst. What will you do when they are all dead?"

"Before they are dead," Von Shautze replied in a deadly voice, "I will have learned of the whereabouts of the bomb sight. Himmel's Gott, that is a secret worth knowing. Some Germans believe the Amerikaners are bluffing regarding this bomb sight. I believe they are telling the truth and I mean to confirm my belief. Do you not know that there is a secret award of fifty thousand marks being offered by Heinrich Himmler if a gestapo agent should cap-

ture one of the bomb sights before the army succeeds in doing so? Think what prestige it would give him . . ."

"I am thinking only of our plan to invade India and capture the Suez Canal, Herr Shautze. The bomb sight would be of untold value in conjunction with the use of the captured Amerikaner bomber, but you do not get secrets from dead men."

"The one on the other bed isn't dead. He is in better health, I believe, and might not lose consciousness so easily," Von Shautze said, approaching Frank Ferugia's bed.

Frank saw him coming and knew that he was in for hell. Two men had tied his arms under the bed after his attempt to leave it. Now he looked up into Oberst Von Shautze's bony, smiling face and knew that he was to be given a special course of treatment designed to make him suffer and yet not cause him to pass out.

"I understand you, too, are a traitor," Von Shautze purred. "An Italian, fighting against his own blood!"

"I'm an American, you Nazi dog," Frank said defiantly. "If you're looking for such traitors, you'll find plenty of them—millions of them, and they're going to march into Berlin . . ."

"Shut up! You know what I want to learn. Right now you will not answer, nein?"

"I'll never answer."

"Ganz gut," Von Shautze nodded and gave orders to two attendants near the bed.

Frank was held motionless while his wounded leg was drawn across the iron bar at the foot of the cot. Von Shautze, as though he derived a pleasure from the infliction of pain which he was loathe to deny himself, struck hard and fast and the leg was shattered in a clean break half way between the ankle and the knee.

In spite of his determination to re-

main conscious, Frank Ferugia realized that the physical shock of the pain might overcome him. Though he was spiritually willing and brave, he could not control the nervous reactions of his organs and now he felt his heart explode in his brain and all feeling left him.

The Herr Doktor, though a good Nazi, remembered his Oath of Hippocrates and he walked to the bed, muttering, "I have no stomach for such tactics. I shall set the leg in a cast immediately."

Herr Oberlitz hissed at Von Shautze, who stood there furious with the club in his bony hand, "What can you do with them now, Herr Oberst? You are always too impatient."

"We still have the prisoners in the storehouse," he said in a gloating voice. "I think I have a trick which will make them talk, jawohl!"

CHAPTER V

WORDS OR BULLETS

IT was near dusk and Fennell was still examining the airfield which presented a more startling picture of efficiency and strength the more he inspected it. The large hangar housed a great number of fighting ships, rather than bombers. In fact he began to suspect that this base had been hidden away here for the purpose of furnishing fighter escorts to the bombers which would lead the mad attack upon India herself.

Even as he watched through the small ventilator he saw a flight of Heinkel 113s slide out of the sky and disappear into the skillfully camouflaged hangar. The only plane in sight on the field was the old Junkers and its rusty-looking sides were battered and dented with use.

Soon a detachment of men approached the hangar, and an Unteroffizier ordered Bill Salas to step outside.

"What's going on now, Heinie?" Fennell asked grimly.

"Perhaps if you watch the operations office you will see for yourself. Von Shautze wishes to question you one at a time. I might add that it would be wise to tell him the truth."

Fennell watched them march Bill away and saw them disappear into the long building on the opposite side of the field. Then he saw two pilots walking from the hangar past the storeroom in which he was imprisoned, and he heard them discussing the bombing raid of the B-24s that day. From the lips of the German's Fennell learned that the destination he had failed to arrive at was a concentration of German ships in the Black Sea. The Americans had done a good job of blasting them according to the heated conversation of the German pilots.

Fennell kept watching the office but he could see nothing of what was going on inside. He knew they would question Bill Salas about the bomb sight among other things, but he felt confident Salas would keep his head and refuse to tell the truth. Salas was big, and a little slow-moving, but he made few mistakes.

Fennell's faith in Bill Salas was confirmed in a ghastly way. He was still watching the office and though it was almost dark a dim glow from one of the windows lighted the walk in front of the door. Bill Salas came out with his hands tied behind him. An officer and four riflemen surrounded him and the implication of the scene was too plain to be missed.

"Good God," Fennell breathed, "they're going to shoot him!"

For a moment there was silence in the prison and then Jimmy Harasta put

on his best Tojo grin and wise-cracked, "Thank God we won't have to eat any more of that shoe-leather and goat juice."

Happy didn't laugh at the crack, because he seldom laughed at anything and the future was anything but bright. They all knew what was going to happen to them.

Fennell kept his eye glued to the ventilator and saw the rifle squad and their victim disappear around a stone barn near the office. A moment later there was the report of the rifles.

It seemed the shot had hardly died away when the detachment came for Jimmy Harasta. Jimmy left, still grinning and bowing to the Germans and saying, "So sorry, please . . ." Jimmy had more guts than a man twice his size.

FENNELL didn't watch the office anymore. He paced the stone floor of their prison like a caged beast and cursed his helplessness. Before he realized what it was, he heard another shot and he tensed. It was too dark in the prison to see Happy Diggins.

"Didn't take Harasta long to convince them he was a hero."

"Funny," Happy grunted, "his folks was Austrian, too."

On their next trip the detachment took their time about entering the prison. They halted for a space outside to smoke a cigarette.

"Tell them lies, Happy—tell them anything. Make them believe we want to help them and save our lives. At least one of us must live to report this hidden airfield," Fennell told Diggins.

"You can have the honor, skipper," Happy said softly.

If Fennell hoped to be chosen next he was doomed to disappointment for when the detachment appeared in the doorway, they took Happy Diggins away with them and had the audacity

to leave Fennell some cigarettes and some matches.

He accepted them because he believed they might provide a weapon which could win his freedom, but he was soon disappointed in this. There was nothing inflammable in the store-room. The walls and floor were stone, and the roof made of thick mud dried upon matting which had to be rolled with a heavy stone during the rainy weather to keep it from soaking up so much water it would cave in.

He lit one of the mild, Turkish smokes and a bitter laugh twisted his lips. "The Melting-pot Musketeers have got burned with too much patriotism," he grunted half aloud.

Just then he heard the third shot. Now he was alone and soon the guards would come for him. He decided to fight it out in the door of the prison and have it over with. If they killed him, he would be no worse off than if he was shot by a firing squad, and if he managed to wrest a gun from one of them, he might be able to escape and hide in the village called the City of Bukhama. Talla would help him.

He worked his fighting blood up to fever pitch while he waited for the Germans to come and get him, but it was soon evident that his frenzy was all for nothing. The Germans didn't return. He pondered on this and the only solution he could arrive at was that the wily Von Shautze meant to let him live through the night with the knowledge of the deaths of his buddies preying on his mind. It was to be a sort of softening up process so that in the morning he would puke up his guts before them in order to save his life. Well, just let them try him out!

And so the black hours huddled about him like a shroud while he tried to think of some miracle which might save him. The miracle came all right, but not from any source he had

dreamed of.

While the executions had been taking place, Frank Ferugia came to in the hospital. He heard none of the shots for by the time his mind had cleared the last of the executions had taken place. He found himself under covers and a dull pain burned in his injured leg.

He felt for his leg and was surprised to find it encased in a plaster of Paris cast. He lay there thinking hard, and wondered what had become of his pals. He remembered Mocko, and Cook, but he couldn't see them for the hospital was totally dark. He made no noise himself because he believed that if he was silent they would leave him alone.

HIS hands felt of the blankets under him and they felt good and warm. Suddenly he felt something else, and examining the object with his fingers he discovered it to be a long pair of scissors. Whoever had put the plaster cast on his leg, or helped with the job, had forgotten the scissors and had not yet missed them.

Frank Ferugia's hand curled about the sharp, pointed steel and he realized what an effective weapon they would make. He made up his mind to fight to the bitter end, for he knew that the Germans would eventually kill him unless he revealed the whereabouts of the bomb-sight, and that was a secret which no amount of torture could drag from him.

Frank Ferugia knew that the Germans despised the Melting-pot Musketeers as traitors because so many of them had forebears who had migrated from Axis countries. That he and his buddies should wish to fight for America against the Axis countries, he considered an outstanding tribute to the country he loved.

Von Shautze, and Herr Oberlitz only confirmed, by their brutal actions, the

causes for which the Musketeers fought. It was the domineering tyranny of Europe which had caused their forebears to flee to America, and now Frank resolved to die, if necessary, to defend his heritage of freedom.

He knew that Fennell and the uninjured men of the B-24's crew had been placed in prison, and he meant to set them free if it were at all possible. Handicapped as he was by his clumsy leg, he must make every ounce of his energy and every second of his time count.

He saw a guard silhouetted against the window beside the door. The window was partly open, and the guard's back was against it. The nights in the mountains were cold, so Frank realized the German would have on his heavy coat. The scissors could never pierce the coat quickly, and effectively enough to kill so he decided the most vulnerable spot would be at the man's throat—the jugular.

Inside the infirmary all was quiet and it was evident the Herr Doktor had gone to bed or to the officers' quarters. If there was a nurse on duty he must be in the ante-room reading, or taking a nap. The German nurses never wasted any care or time on "Der verdammte Amerikaner schwein!"

Frank shoved the covers back and with both hands managed to lift his cast to the floor, after which he slid down and lay stretched out. He held the scissors firmly in his slim hand and wormed his way directly toward the window, passing under two cots as he did so. The stone floor deadened all sound, and as he reached the window, he dragged himself erect, careful to keep in the deep shadow alongside the opening.

He rested most of his weight on one leg, and prayed that he wouldn't lose his balance at the last moment. Holding the scissors ready, he put his hand

to the casement window. He must contrive to get the window open, and then by some slight sound cause the guard to turn toward him so he could strike at the German's throat.

The thing happened with more speed than he had counted on, for as he pushed the window open the rusty, hand-wrought hinges creaked complainingly.

"Was ist los?" the guard grumbled and turned to look into the room. The faint illumination of the moon cast his features in full relief for one startling moment.

THEN Frank plunged the scissors at the white line of throat showing above the collar of the German's coat. He struck hard and true, felt the blood gush warm and thick over his hand and at the same time he contrived to ram his other fist into the German's mouth to keep him from screaming out before he died.

With his jugular severed the German died swiftly and Frank managed to drag his plaster cast over the low sill and slide outside near the fallen Guard. Quickly he searched the German and took his Luger. Then he crawled and wormed his way across the hard, beaten earth toward the storehouse which was a prison.

On the way he stopped near the well and water tanks to wash the blood from his hand, and as he slid once more into the open he knew he might be discovered by the guard in front of the prison. He had no conception of the time, but he could see the gray light of dawn casting up from the east.

His plan was to wait until the guard had left Fennell's door, then make his way to the prison and shoot the lock off the door if necessary. Therefore, when he deemed it safe, he slid around the tanks and directly toward the prison.

He wasn't aware of the second German until it was too late for he didn't realize that the time for changing guard had arrived. He was almost at the door when the German turned on him with an oath, and raised his rifle to shoot.

"All right, you Nasty—you asked for it," Frank growled, and fired one shot into the man's guts, dropping him instantly.

There was no time, to think or plan, or try and open the prison lock. Frank hoisted himself to a box standing near the wall on which the Germans had rested during their tours of duty. He managed to slide the Luger through the ventilator which had served Fennell as a peep-hole to horror, and he cried:

"Take the gun, Jim—Skipper," he corrected himself even in that dire moment. "Make a break and get away . . ."

He didn't stop to hear Fennell's reaction or his remarks, for there was no time to be lost. The shot would soon arouse the camp and Frank Ferugia knew that his only chance of life lay in getting back to his bed before his orgy of killing was discovered.

But Fennell had reactions, plenty of them, and his overwrought nerves failed, at first, to grasp the situation.

He had recognized Frank's voice, and he thanked his God for men like the Musketeers.

Fennell groped for the gun, and finding it he shoved it inside the belt of his pants. Then he climbed up to his look-out hole through which the gun had come, and watched the excitement purr into life outside.

First, the guard who had marched away from the door, returned cautiously, inquiring, "Was ist's? Heinrich—shprecken Sie, schnell!"

IT WAS getting lighter by the moment outside, and Fennell saw an-

other man walking over from the direction of the hangar. He saw nothing of Frank Ferugia for by the time he had accustomed his eyes to the light outside Frank had disappeared back through the window of the darkened hospital.

The German coming from the hangar saw the dead guard in front of the hospital and rushed over that way, shouting as he did so. The excitement spread like magic but the stupefied German privates and Unter-offiziers, were at a loss as to what should be done and formed in jibbering groups.

But the confusion soon gave way to disciplined obedience as the door of the officer's quarters opened, and Von Shautze, half dressed and yet in spite of that looking like the true Prussian, took charge.

He snarled his orders. Inspected the dead men. He ranted in a shrill, maniacal voice, "Lieber Gott—zum teufel—schweinhund!"

He stopped suddenly on the center of the beaten field and glowered at the door of the prison.

"The verdammt Amerikaner in the storeroom—he did this! I knew I should have killed him first. He got the door open . . ."

"But the door is locked, Excellenz," an unter-offizier insisted, having tried the door with his own hand.

"Ruhig—shut up, dumkopf! Do men die of bullets and knives in the hands of ghosts, then? I shall soon learn how it is you fools have been tricked. . . ."

And Von Shautze started toward the prison, drawing a gun as he moved like a jungle beast stalking prey. Fennell saw him coming, and marvelled at the hate which writhed in the German's face. Fennell got down off his box and took up a post right beside the door. He prayed that Von Shautze would come in first for regardless of

what it might mean he was determined to kill the German before he made good his escape.

However, Von Shautze didn't charge into the storeroom at once. There was a tense period of inaction which puzzled Fennell until he saw a shadow block out the ventilator hole above him. He was sure he couldn't be seen from the ventilator, and then he had a feeling that someone was on the roof.

Before he could coordinate his suspicions and decide upon a course of action, the door swung open!

"Come out, you dog!" Von Shautze cried.

Fennell took a firm grip on his gun and then leaped into the doorway. Crouching a little as he moved, he headed for Von Shautze. The Oberst was in the clear with a gun in his bony fist. Some Germans stood on either side of him but none of them had drawn their weapons expecting to witness nothing more than an execution by Oberst Von Shautze.

When Shautze saw the gun in Fennell's fist his face went gray like old liver. His gaunt form seemed to shake with a reaction of fear and when he did fire his shot went wide. Fennell's shots didn't go wide—they went on a direct line into the Oberst's chest and head!

THE Germans, stunned by this sudden death to their superior started to close in and Fennell prepared to make a fight of it. He might have succeeded, except for one precaution the wily Oberst had taken. There was a man on the roof, and as Fennell started into the open, the man dived upon him, dragging him to the ground.

Fennell tried to fight him off, but the other Germans piled into the fight and overcame him by sheer weight of numbers. Fennell's stocky body

writhed under the heap of men and he gouged and kicked and squirmed. He felt fists pounding him on the head in an ineffectual attempt to knock him unconscious. He felt a thick finger across his mouth, and he bit it savagely as the victim let out a cry of pain. He grabbed a blond head and got a hand full of hair, but he was tiring fast.

Suddenly there was a sharp command and the pile untangled itself miraculously. Fennell crawled to his feet with two Germans hanging onto his arms. His gun was gone, and his chances to escape were gone with it. He had killed Von Shautze, however—he had avenged Jimmy Harasta, Bill Salas, and Happy Diggins.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH TRANSPORT

FENNELL wiped the blood from his scratched face and looked into the grim, flushed face of Herr Oberlitz, the missionary.

"It is useless to waste words, Herr Lieutenant," the missionary said. "This man you have killed is far too important for me to take the responsibility of executing you. You see, the Gestapo might say that I, an army man, had killed him myself, and then killed you to cover up my crime. They must learn the truth before you die. You and your friends must accompany me to Germany!"

"Damn you!" Fennell cursed him, "my friends are dead."

Oberlitz smiled dryly, "And what use would we have for dead men?" he said enigmatically. Then he snapped some orders and the Germans picked up Von Shautze and carried him toward the old Dornier transport for

Herr Oberlitz intended to take the Oberst's corpse back to Germany to confirm his story of the killing. Other men began working on the transport and warming up the engines.

Oberlitz ordered Fennell to be brought to his office where he could keep an eye on him personally, but not before Fennell's hands had been shackled in front of him. Wondering what would happen next, Fennell sat in the small office with a guard constantly at his side.

Oberlitz rummaged about in a desk and from a lower drawer drew out a lot of papers. He sent for someone and when the man came, Fennell shuddered at the sight of him for he was scarcely human in appearance. Not that his body was out of the ordinary, but the hellish expression of his square, pasty face coupled with the animal intensity of his eyes gave him an air of supernatural powers.

"Ganz gut," Oberlitz replied to the man's purred greeting, "we are in luck, Leutnant Menzer. Von Shautze, in his impatience bungled the job and got killed. . . ."

"But how?" Menzer asked softly scarcely opening his ghoulish lips.

"Does it matter? I am conducting no investigation at present so that my story can't be questioned. I shall say that an Arab sneaked into the camp and shoved this Luger through the ventilator of the prison room. Then the prisoner shot Von Shautze. . . ."

"But what of the guard at the hospital window?"

"He fell on his own bayonet—a bloody accident but a fatal one. Can you remember all this?"

"Ja, Excellenz."

"Gut. With the Oberst dead we shall have no interference from the Gestapo for the time being. We shall act according to those papers piled on my desk. You are to be in charge

until I return. The flight of the captured bomber will have to be delayed for a day, but I believe if you will approach the natives and tell them that what I have been preaching them is the truth, they will do as we wish them to," Oberlitz explained vaguely.

Menzer seemed to understand perfectly. "I request the honor of leading the fighters which accompany the bomber, Herr Oberlitz," Menzer said, saluting stiffly.

"I know of no better fighter than you, Leutnant Menzer," Oberlitz said, giving his permission.

THEN a German came to the door and announced that the plane was ready and Fennell was marched out to the Dornier. As he entered the cabin of the plane, he stood still and stared in disbelief.

There, seated forward in the transport, were Jimmy Harasta, Bill Salas, and Happy Diggins! They hadn't been killed. Fennell understood now, that the apparent executions had been staged to soften him up.

"Sit down, Herr Leutnant Fennell," Oberlitz said smoothly. "I told you we would have no use for dead men. Von Shautze always did think of the most useless tricks."

Fennell sat in one of the seats to the right of the aisle, just ahead of the rear seats which contained two Germans with Tommy guns. Happy Diggins was directly across from Fennell in front of one of the German guards, with Harasta and Salas just ahead of him. The body of Von Shautze, as though to remind them of the crime they must answer for, occupied the space forward near the door leading to the pilot's compartment.

Oberlitz edged his way around the corpse and went into the pilot's compartment, leaving the Musketeers with the two guards. Fennell was the only

man handcuffed, but none of them could make a false move without bringing on a torrent of Tommy-gun slugs.

Fennell's mind worked desperately at the problem of escape. If they should actually reach Germany, the chances of escape would be almost nil.

Fennell could think of no fool-proof plan of escape. For one thing if the plane was forced down in Turkey, they would be interned for the duration and the only difference between a Turkish prison camp and a German one would be the matter of treatment.

The miles slid swiftly behind them and though Fennell felt the desperate need for haste in making their escape the means still eluded him. When the chance did come, it came so suddenly he was almost caught off guard.

Happy Diggins had somehow secreted a cigarette and some matches in his jacket and without even looking back at the guard he produced the cigarette and struck a match to light it. The guard directly behind Diggins crouched forward from his seat, the Tommy-gun under his arm.

"Dunnen-vetter! Nein—no smoking. . . ."

The guard reached a clumsy hand forward to snatch the cigarette from Diggins' lips and as he did so Happy caught his wrist, and jerked the man forward across his shoulder. At the same time the guard behind Fennell let out a curse and lifted his Tommy-gun to blast Happy Diggins.

FENNELL catapulted from his seat and lifting his manacled hands he brought the steel handcuffs down across the German's head so viciously that even through the man's cap the blow stunned him, but not before the Tommy-gun had coughed one burst.

Fennell saw Diggins double up and slide to the floor and his stocky body shook with suppressed rage and hate.

He snatched the Tommy-gun from the stunned German and even though his hands were locked close together he managed to swing it up and send a torrent of bullets into the guard who had attacked Diggins in the first place.

The German fell dead at the first burst and Bill Salas, diving into the aisle caught up the tommy-gun dropped by the dead man, and turned it on the other guard who was coming to just behind Fennell. One shuddering blast and that guard, too, was dead.

"Thanks, Bill," Fennell snorted but his eyes were on the door of the pilot's compartment, for even above the roar of the big motors the sound of the shots must have penetrated the thin partition.

Just as he warned the others to keep down, the door opened and Oberlitz slid into view with a Luger clutched in his pudgy fist.

Fennell didn't hesitate. He knew what he must do. He knew that in this war the enemy held no illusions of sportsmanship or chivalry. It was kill or be killed so before Oberlitz could say, "Lieber Gott—Achtung . . ." Fennell's slugs had pinned him back against the wall.

"Take a look at Diggins and watch these dogs," Fennell ordered as he clawed his way up the aisle of the wildly pitching plane. The pilot had suspected something wrong and was trying to make fighting impossible.

Fennell reached the cabin door after squeezing past the corpse of Von Shautae over which the body of Oberlitz had fallen in a brotherly embrace as though death had sealed their quarrels forever. But when he poked the gun into the pilot's cabin, the pilot put up his hands without a fight. He had more sense than courage.

Fennell took charge of the plane and gave orders. He was afraid to ask how

Happy Diggins was but Bill Salas assured him that Diggins was still barely alive.

"We've got to save him—he saved all of us," Fennell said softly.

He had them throw the dead Germans overboard to be interned in the wilds of Turkey until resurrection day. His first impulse was to force the pilot to parachute from the plane, but he changed his mind when he realized the man could contact the hidden drome and have pursuit ships sent up to intercept them.

He had been freed of the handcuffs by Jimmy Harasta who had found the key to the cuffs on Oberlitz before throwing the dead missionary into the hell to which he had consigned so many victims, so now Fennell had the pilot handcuffed to one of the seats.

"We might have use for him. There's a tough job ahead of us," he remarked.

The prospects of that job ahead were anything but promising. He remembered the brutal face of Lieutenant Menzer and knew the man capable of anything. The B-24 must somehow be rescued along with the buried bombsight. Then, too, the wounded Musketiers in the hospital of the hidden drome must also be taken home. He wondered what plan Menzer and Oberlitz had cooked up between them.

ALL these thoughts swarmed through Fennell's head as he toiled the big Dornier back toward the native city of Bhamdoon. They must recapture the bomber first.

Fennell called Jimmy Harasta forward to take over while he inspected Happy Diggins' wounds, but Jimmy told him:

"It's no use, Skipper. He's dead."

Fennell gritted his teeth and said grimly, "I hope to God we all claim as much at our death as he has. He made it possible for the rest of us to go on

fighting—to save the B-24 and the men in the hospital. He was a hero . . ."

"What shall we do with him, Skipper?"

"He's going home with us," Fennell retorted fiercely.

CHAPTER VII

STRANGE ALLY

BY THE time they approached the ancient city of Bhamdoon Fennell had a plan all worked out. They would stop on the road where the bomber had landed and contrive to make the Germans believe they were Oberlitz and his own staff until the Germans came out into the open. Then they would attack and try to reach the bomber.

They managed the landing all right, and waited for a moment to see what might happen. The B-24 was half hidden in the trees two hundred yards to their left, but the thing which worried Fennell was that the earth all about the spot of the B-24's crash had been dug up and he realized they had been looking for the bombsight guessing that it had been buried.

Fennell turned to Salas and Harasta and said grimly, "Have the Tommy-guns pointed at the windows. I'll open the door and try to draw them out."

One German was already running toward the transport as Fennell opened the door. At the same time the German prisoner handcuffed to one of the seats, shouted a warning in German from inside the plane. The approaching German turned and fled into the rocks and trees, and rifle fire singled over the Dornier.

Fennell cursed, "We've got to make a sneak around them. I'll go to the left and you two men go to the right. Belly

your way toward the B-24 and save your ammunition!"

Bullets kicked dust into their faces as they dived for the cover of the nearest rocks. Fennell circled around behind the rock where the bombsight had been buried, and he felt his blood congeal as he saw an empty hole where the sight had been concealed. For a moment he was unable to move for with the sight in the hands of the Germans all of the brave fight of the Musketeers was of no importance.

Their only hope lay in the possibility that the Germans had replaced the sight in the bomber though that possibility seemed very remote. Yet, if they had the sight, why had Oberlitz not crowed about it?

A bullet whipping close to his head changed Fennell's thoughts. First the bomber must be captured. But that wasn't to be easy for the Germans were concealed behind a big rock from which they could pick off the Musketeers without exposing themselves.

Fennell cursed as he edged his way along for he knew the Germans could only be dislodged by an attack from the rear. Harasta and Selas were still firing from the right and Fennell decided to make the rear attack himself. But in order to reach the rear of the rock he must cross an open space of ground where death could leap upon him suddenly.

He decided to chance it and started forward on his belly. Bullets kicked dirt into his face. A red hot flame seared his back as hot lead creased his shoulders. He suddenly realized he could never make the crossing and turned to fight it out as best he could with nothing more than a Luger.

BUT just then help came from an unexpected quarter. Gunshots sounded from behind the Germans. One of the men behind the rock threw up his

arms and pitched forward on his face. The others, believing themselves ambushed by another force of Americans fled back into the trees. To Fennell's dismay, he saw that there had been only three Germans, probably guards, with the bomber.

Jimmy Harasta shot one of the fleeing men, and the German fell dead.

The next moment Fennell was behind the rock, and he saw coming up from a shallow gully, the figure of Talla, the Syrian girl. She carried a long Rif rifle and her slim shoulders were straight and firm.

"Lalitzak saredde, my friend," she greeted him. "I knew the German dogs would never kill you."

"Thanks," Fennell said. "Was that you who shot at them—killed one of them?"

"Aywa—yes."

"Who has been digging up the earth here?" he indicated the holes which had been freshly dug.

"Heer Oberlitz offered a fabulous reward—many tesheeks for the one who could find the strange machine from your bomber," she said, smiling again.

"And they found it?"

"La—how could they when it was I who saw you bury it? I hate the German dogs who have fawned and pawed at me. All their tesheeks and all their bishleeks could not buy even one touch of my lips. May good God give you the strength to overcome them." The ancient wisdom of Syria was in her voice. Ten thousand years of poverty and oppression flashed in her eyes. "Tuala hena," she said, beckoning him to follow her.

She disclosed the bombight hidden under an ancient cedar in the bottom of the gully in which her goats grazed.

"They believed me only an ignorant girl fit for nothing but their caresses. I moved the machine during the night, knowing they might find it so close to

the road."

Fennell tried to thank her but she replied, "All I desire is that you drive the German dogs out of Bhamdoon."

Fennell and his two remaining men got busy transferring most of the petrol from the Dornier to the B-24. The bombsight was replaced and when all was ready he explained what they must do.

"I'll pilot the Dornier back across the hidden drome and force the prisoner to radio that I am Oberlitz returning for the men in the hospital and to have them ready to move as it has been decided they will make good witnesses to all that has happened. I'll have him report that we are bringing the bomber in to the field in preparation for the attack on the Suez."

"I'd better go in the Dornier with you," Jimmy Harasta suggested. "When you land you'll need help in the first attack."

Fennell agreed and explained further, "Bill, you bring the bomber down so that you can slip into the gunner's nest and cover the hangar with the forward guns. That will give Jimmy and me a chance to carry the wounded men to the B-24. We've got to keep Menzer and the fighter ships from getting into the air."

THE B-24 had been repaired by the Germans and the bombs were still in the racks. After transferring Happy Diggins' body to the bomber, Fennell took the Dornier off. The German prisoner was forced into the co-pilot's seat of the Dornier with his hands shackled behind him. Harasta crouched behind them with a Tommy-gun.

The B-24 taxied out of the trees and then thundered up after the Dornier. Fennell knew he must attack the hidden drome before Menzer could start any counter-move and he wondered if the escaped German who had run from the

rock during the fight at the bomber had reached the field in the small valley.

As he approached the field, Fennell held the mike in front of the German prisoner next to him, and forced him to repeat what he had been told, threatening to shoot him if he spoke one word of warning. The German was thoroughly cowed by now, and did as he was told.

He explained that Herr Oberlitz, believing the wounded men would make valuable witnesses, was returning to take them away and ordered them to be made ready instantly.

Soon after, Fennell headed the Dornier into the narrow landing field. The B-24 trailed him down, and the Germans suspecting nothing wrong made no preparations for defense. But as the Dornier hit the ground, Fennell ran it off the field toward the hospital, cracking up against a corner of the building.

With Jimmy Harasta covering his back and forgetting the German in the co-pilot's seat, Fennell leaped out and headed for the hospital with one of the captured Lugers in his fist. There was only the doctor and one nurse inside the hospital and they made no resistance. Frank Ferugia let out a cry of delight at seeing Fennell and Harasta. He got out of bed in spite of his cast and hopped to the door beside Harasta.

Fennell had to carry Johnny Mocko who was still badly off, but Howard Cook managed to stagger to his feet despite his wound. Fennell tossed his gun to Frank Ferugia and the weird squad headed for the hell which was boiling up outside.

Leutnant Menzer, infuriated by this trick attack upon the drome for which, at the time, he was responsible, was shouting orders and sending his bewildered pilots for the fighter ships in the big hangar. Bill Salas instead of using the forward gun of the bomber which

would give him one direction fire, was outside with the Tommy-gun and making good use of what ammunition was left in it.

Through the shouting and the dust and the bullets, Fennell managed to get himself and the wounded men into the B-24. He leaped for the control bucket and shouted orders as he boomed the 1200 Wasps.

"Salas get on the bomb sight—Ferugia and Harasta give a hand with the guns!"

The huge bomber shuddered and rose into the air. Even Howard Cook, wounded as he was, crawled to one of the gun positions to do what he could. Already Menzer was getting some of the fighters into the air as the B-24 swept across the big hangar.

"Kick out some bombs—kick 'em out!" Fennell cried over the inter-com.

BILL SALAS dropped a stick squarely across the hangar and the huge structure seemed to shudder and float up off the earth. Fennell banked the Consolidated B-24 hard and swept back across the operations buildings even though the four Messys which had escaped the bombs were rising to intercept them.

The operations buildings burst into flames and the B-24 swept back relentlessly tearing up the field, the storehouses, and at last the ammunition and petrol stores. As Fennell swung the big bomber away to the south, the hidden field was a shambles of wreckage.

Even as Fennell was taking grim note of his cargo—one man dead, three wounded, and others buried in Syria, the Messys attacked. Menzer was leading them and they came in like savage dogs eager to wreak vengeance upon these descendants of Europeans who fought with such savagery.

Cook got one of the Messys but the other three became wary and attacked

from a distance with their 20mm cannon. Slowly they began to wear the B-24 down.

They were almost to Beirut when he saw six British planes on patrol and he knew they were at last safe. The Germans, too, realizing that they were to be cheated of their prey made one last, desperate try.

Menzer, insane with fury, and knowing his future was doomed by the miraculous escape of the Americans with their prized bomber, made a suicide attempt to ram his Messerschmitt into the cabin of the B-24.

Fennell saw him coming, and he yelled over the intercom, "Give him hell for me, Ferugia!" Then he hauled back on the controls and stood the huge ship on her tail so Frank could have a clean shot. The guns rattled and Menzer's ship disintegrated in the air.

Fennell felt better after that. He saw the British take care of the other German planes, and then he heard Scotty's lusty voice booming over the inter-plane phone.

"Hoot, mon, ye gied him a fair trouncin'!" Scotty cheered. Then he went on to tell of how he had walked for twenty-four hours after having bailed from his ship and how he had contacted a British outpost and told them of the B-24 having been forced down. "Ye Yankees are sae fair impatient, ye'll even deny a mon the pleasure of rescuing you!"

Fennell explained what had happened as he steadied the B-24 for the run home. "The bravest of us are dead," he finished, thinking of Happy Diggins.

Scotty replied gravely, "War is like that, laddy. It dinna make nae difference when ye die, or where, but how ye die that counts. May the good Lord hae the mercy to gie the American meltin' pot more raw material such as that ye lost!"

HELL-ON-WHEELS IN A COCKPIT

by

DAVID J. BRANDT

Author of "Once a Flying Tiger," etc.

He was wreathed in the cockpit of the U. S. Army's newest and toughest fighter plane for the first time, and Lieutenant Sampson Jones was looking for trouble!



Then suddenly Jay Leno came screaming out of a cloudbank to crash the lone Sphero!

THE first important objective in thirteen months of careful planning had been gained!

Sampson Jones, 1st Lieutenant U. S. Army Air Corps, was poking his pipe-stem neck into the Devil's Nutsucker—Gondakanal!

With almost careless indifference he soared the P-47, newest of Army fighter planes, through a rift of clouds and dropped to three thousand ceiling. Below him lay the stubby finger of Koli Point jutting out from the north shore of the Marine-held island

By strict reckoning, Sampson Jones should have swept into Henderson Field from the south, avoiding any possible chance of combat with the Nips who still slipped occasional reinforcements into their beleaguered jungle lines from the north and could still bring their deadly Zeros into the battle from Bougainville and lurking carriers hiding somewhere out in the watery vastness southeast of the Carolines.

But Sampson Jones was looking for trouble! It had been a simple matter to get lost in the clouds at forty thousand and then spin earthward to smack Koli Point right on the nose.

He had been an instructor in aerial navigation for the flying personnel of Consolidated Airways for six months prior to Pearl Harbor.

The tough-skinned Thunderbolt cruised lazily and circled the Point several times before Sampson was satisfied that there would be no interference from Nipponese A-A batteries probably hidden in the heavy jungle below.

He was a little disappointed.

This hadn't been the way he had planned it.

Guadalcanal looked pretty tame.

Sampson couldn't have known that a flight of B-24's had wiped out seven anti-aircraft batteries the Japs had set up to protect Koli Point—their last slim beach-head where hoped-for reinforcements might land under cover of darkness—soon.

SAMPSON hanked and dropped the ship to fifteen hundred to get a better look at four beached Nipponese transports, their charred hulks grotesquely skeletoned against the beach in the glare of a fierce late afternoon sun.

That was when five Jap Zeros came screaming out of a cloudbank and peeled off to smash the lone fighter into a metallic pulp.

It was Sampson Jones' first trip into the combat zone—and almost his last!

The Zeros came down for the kill, split two and two for a cross-fire blast from their deadly 20-mm quick firing cannons. The tail of the Zero formation stayed upstairs to scout the skies suspiciously at three thousand.

The sucker bait Sampson Jones was presenting seemed too obviously simple for their treacherous Nipponese minds to accept.

Sampson Jones saw the batwinged yellow devils coming. His pale white features turned to milky marble. Not from fear—but the sudden realization that this was what he had been waiting for.

The first slap-slap of 20-mm shells hurricaned a leaden hell around the Thunderbolt as Sampson deliberately whipped up the nose of his ship into the teeth of that yellow skinned bite. The unexpected maneuver upset the Jap timetable of destruction. Several hits scored the wings of the Thunderbolt, but nervous fingers behind the Nip cannons were not equal to the job of facing that deadly falcon soaring up to meet them.

The war birds of the Rising Sun turned into fledgling sparrows as the Thunderbolt clawed hungry gouges of altitude and kept climbing with steady speed.

The fact that the American's guns were still silent chilled the enemy even more.

Was this a cursed Yankee trap into which they had fallen?

Their downward line of attack faltered. They pulled out of headlong target plunge and zoomed up less than two hundred yards from the nosing Thunderbolt.

With magnificent speed and maneuverability, the Zeros went screaming for plenty of altitude advantage and then came down again for a quick thrust at

the Thunderbolt's vitals.

Sampson Jones was grinning whitely. His fingers itched to slap down on the control button that would bring eight .50 calibre Brownings to life.

It would have been a simple method of relieving the tautness inside of him. But that wasn't the way he had figured this whole mad scheme of his out.

He was deliberately allowing the Japs to attack without a single effort at self defense—with the odds five to one!

But he had to discover one thing before he struck back!

It was enough to crack any sane man.

Sampson Jones was a little mad—or he wouldn't have left Eglin Field, Florida, where life as a test pilot had been a pleasant and exhilarating adventure.

The Zeros were coming in close now, their guns snarling in defiant challenge. Shell fragments did some damage to the wings and ripped into the stubby fuselage. A Jap came swooping head-on for the slanted cockpit as Sampson continued to gun for attitude. .50 calibre stuff from the Zero's twin machine guns spouted from the spinning nose of the fighter.

It was pointblank range! By rights, Sampson should have become a riddled corpse. Lead rattled off the steel armored fuselage like dried peas.

Sampson waited for the bite of lead that never came.

The Thunderbolt could take it!

THE Zero shadowed over the ship and fled for a temporary, upstairs berth while the others pounced on the Thunderbolt, throwing everything in the book at the grey fortress.

For three minutes, the Zeros had all the opportunity in the world to turn Sampson Jones into a dead pigeon. The P-47 was taking a beating—but there was a limit.

At twenty-seven thousand feet, Sampson levelled off—and called it a

day.

The Thunderbolt was ripped and scarred and slashed in dozens of places—but the 2000 h.p. radial air-cooled heart that was in her was still pounding fiercely.

The Japs never got another chance to find out what manner of fighting ship they were pitted against—a ship and pilot that had taken all they could dish out—and still survived—without firing a shot in return!

Sampson went into action with startling suddenness.

He had found out what he came to Koli Point for—the Thunderbolt had proven herself ready for the biggest and toughest job in any man's war—the private war of Sampson Jones!

The twenty-seven-year-old test pilot whipped the sky falcon into a loop—and came out on the tail of a surprised Zero confidently moving in for the kill—from behind.

Sampson's hand came down fast to mash the trigger button of his Brownings. With the Zero less than a hundred yards ahead, ringed in the target sight, it was slaughter the way the octet of guns ripped the Jap to pieces.

One long burst was enough.

No Zero could withstand that terrible fire-power at pointblank range.

The fighter exploded in all directions.

The other four Zeros scattered as a winged maniac took after them.

Sampson Jones was relentless in his deadly pursuit. At combat ceiling of twenty-five thousand, the Thunderbolt was more than a match for the scavenger pack. The ship was justifying months of delay in turning out this sky terror.

Sampson got the tail of a Zero scampering for balcony seat in his sights for a second. His terrible guns blasted away the entire assembly. The Jap fluttered, mortally wounded, then

flopped over like a dead duck and went plunging earthward, out of control.

Sampson Jones deliberately levelled off, inviting the surviving trio to come down after him from their lofty perch. He cut the motor three times to give the impression that he was in trouble.

The Japs sucked the bait eagerly.

Two of them attacked in a screaming sweep while the third tried for a knockout stab from behind.

Although Sampson had never fought real combat in two thousand hours of grueling test flying, five hundred of those hours had been spent subjecting the Thunderbolt to everything and anything except live ammunition.

He had grown up with this deadly fighter from its first infant flight test and knew every whimper and snarl and scream in her. That was why it had been simple—almost too simple—for him to talk his commanding officer into a chance to fly this crate from assembly in Port Moresby direct to Guadalcanal for further studies on its durability in real combat.

The Japs, some of their confidence returning, came in sharply, diving from either side and behind the Thunderbolt to crush it in a deadly nutcracker.

SAMPSON let them come close enough to crackle their futile armament at him, then gave the ship everything it could take. Despite the fact that the P-47 was two and a half times heavier than the Zeros, she shot upward with blinding speed, away from the gnashing jaws of the nutcracker. Sampson shoved the stick forward suddenly and put the ship into an unorthodox outside loop.

The Zeros, obviously with green pilots at the controls, found the trap empty and went into familiar routine—zoom for height to strike at the Thunderbolt in a lightning sweep

again.

Sampson gave them no respite. The Thunderbolt went after them with speed and maneuverability for a ship of her type that far surpassed anything the Yanks had been able to pit against the enemy.

Sampson caught a lagging Jap in his own backyard and spanked savagely with his Brownings. Lead dissolved the left wing of the Jap and crumpled it like tissue paper.

Sampson sideslipped and then chewed towards the Rising Sun's front porch, barely missing collision with the falling debris of his third victim.

The twin-Japs left wanted no further part or parcel of this new sky monster whose almost-invincibility was soon to spread legends of fresh terror from one end of the South Pacific to the other. They went whimpering to their base with the stony fear of death driving them on.

Sampson Jones had a thin smile on his bloodless lips as he compassed for Henderson Field. The sun was going down rapidly—and he was beginning to get a little worried—for fear of missing evening chow.

One thing he loved more than flying—his pampered stomach.

He thought of that golden brown broiled pompano he had enjoyed at Miami less than seventy-two hours ago and frowned.

He had heard that these tough Marines camping on Guadalcanal thrived on peppermint sticks flavored with dynamite.

He came down over the jungle island at twenty-five hundred r.p.m., the eighteen cylinder hum of the Thunderbolt pushing her along at three hundred and twenty m.p.h.

Jap troops buried in the jungle itself never even had a chance to unlimber a few trial shots at the streaking phantom.

Sampson would have enjoyed a leisurely trip to see what the little yellow devils were up to down there—but he was in a hurry—for his chow.

Sampson altered his course just enough to joyously waste the rest of his ammunition.

Far ahead in a slash of open jungle, a huge mass of crawling ants were moving up to engage American ground forces. The dying brilliance of the sun made them an excellent target.

The Japs never knew what hit them!

One moment the sky was empty and peaceful. The next—a powerful drone beat upon terrified ears, and a greyish blob of winged death swooped down at three hundred miles per hour splashing the fastest storm of lead the Nips had ever seen.

It was a beautiful afternoon for exterminating vermin.

Sampson was riding back to Henderson Field before the Japs could piece together scattered and broken columns to meet this new torturous plague.

SAMPSON JONES remembered to switch on his radio just before he hit Henderson Field.

"P-47 calling Henderson Field," he snapped into the mike. . . . "Contact please." He repeated several times before the welcome, "Come in, P-47," buzzed in his earphones.

A crisp voice followed with, "Circle and come in from the south, sir. A couple of bad holes on your starboard as you come down. Watch out for them."

"Right," Sampson said. Obediently he banked and came in for a south landing. His wheels, already unfolded, touched the ground and rolled him in for a perfect landing.

He missed a huge bomb crater by three feet.

The Thunderbolt traveled the length of the landing strip and taxied up to

the edge of heavy jungle. Khaki clad figures were running towards the ship from heavily camouflaged hangars.

Sampson cut the motor and climbed stiffly from the ship. He felt a little tired. But his thin features showed no emotion over the gruelling experience to which he had just been subjected.

He wasn't the kind of a guy that fussed.

He had lived too long on borrowed time.

Sampson had crashed three ships in test flight. His reaction after calmly walking away from the third blazing wreck with two busted ribs had left Eglin Field a little stunned—impatient to get back on the job and finish what was to be his own private little war.

A cinnamon bearded giant with a gold maple leaf pinned to either shoulder of a muddy shirt advanced from the camouflaged hangar directly ahead to meet Sampson.

Sampson Jones started to salute in the best military fashion. The giant with the cinnamon whiskers waved it aside impatiently. His eyes roved anxiously over the shell scarred plane, already being wheeled into the jungle hangar.

"You're Lieutenant Jones, I presume," he said quickly. "We've been expecting you—for quite some time. I'm Major Trent."

Sampson caught a slight ironic pause stressing the time delay.

"Sorry, sir," he said. "Ran into a little trouble on the way from Mor-esby." And added with a touch of pride, "This baby's just about perfect. Still have enough gas left in the tanks for a sight seeing trip and as for fighter qualities—honestly, sir, those Japs haven't got what it takes to knock her out of the sky." Sampson grinned a little, driving some of the homely plainness from his face.

"I ought to know, sir."

"Hmm," Trent grunted. But his eyes were bright with anticipation.

They had been waiting a long time for the Thunderbolt out there. Coded reports from Moresby had acquainted Trent with its test results.

This was the first long range fighter plane to reach the Island. Many more would be on the way as fast as they could be relayed from Republic's huge plant.

The roar of artillery in the distance drew Sampson's attention for a moment. The lighter rat-tat-tat of machine gun fire blended in.

Sampson smiled.

He had had a lot of fun with the last of his ammunition.

A chunky sergeant tipped a respectful salute to Sampson and said grinning, "Must have had quite a show on the way over, sir," And added, "You ran out of ammo."

Sampson chuckled. "The matinee wasn't half bad, sergeant," he replied, "I think I'm going to like it out here. Change ought to do me a lot of good."

He frowned a little—his mind going back thirteen months for the moment.

TRENT mistook that smile, "You've done a fine job, lieutenant. In a few days you'll be heading back to the States again. We need you back there to send us out planes like this one."

Sampson's reply was soft. "I think, perhaps, you misunderstood me, Major. You see, sir, my job—out here—is just beginning."

Trent puzzled over that for a moment, then glanced quickly at the thin, almost frail looking, figure beside him: Sampson Jones weighed a hundred and forty pounds dripping wet and looked as if a good stiff wind could blow him over.

Sampson suddenly sniffed. "I smell

food," he said delightedly, and added, "Praise the Lord and pass the beans—sir."

Guadalcanal was no place for a rest cure. Sampson discovered that half an hour after he had taxied in. Bombers and fighters escorts were taking off with hourly regularity to blast away at Jap jungle positions and harass shipping trying to bring in much needed supplies from the Carolines and a dozen other small bases dotting the waters north-east of the battle zone.

Sampson slept heartily despite continuous machine gun and artillery fire from a dozen points to the east and west of Henderson Field where the Japs were attempting to resist the slugging tactics of the leathernecks and crack army troops.

The crashing explosion of heavy shellfire from the hectic sea lanes awoke Sampson at four o'clock that morning. His pulses were jumping a little.

Was another vital naval engagement in progress? Halsey's men of iron had smashed five abortive attempts to retake Guadalcanal and apparently were still on the job.

Sampson was alert and on his feet by the time the roar of warming motors throbbed in his ears. Trent's boys were going up for a look.

Sampson stumbled through the darkness, fumbling for his flying jacket and webbed belt with its .45 Colt automatic. Somehow he waded through a stream of busy brass hats without being stopped or questioned and made his way to the hangar where the Thunderbolt had been wheeled.

Swearing non-coms were directing a horde of grease monkeys, busy outfitting several ships for immediate take-off.

Sampson bumped into a stocky figure.

"Hey, what the . . ." the figure

growled and then added quickly, "Oh, Lieutenant Jones. Sorry, sir."

It was the sergeant who had taken over the supervision of putting the Thunderbolt back in combat shape.

Sampson glanced around furtively for an instant. Cinnamon-bearded Major Trent was busy apparently some where else.

This was it!

Unless he took advantage of the sea attack, Sampson realized he would be Florida bound in forty-eight hours with the opportunity of finishing the job he had schemed his way out here to do lost forever.

"Is the ship ready for flight, Sergeant?" Sampson snapped.

The non-com nodded. "Put the finishing touches on her about midnight, sir," he replied. "Gas tanks filled, guns loaded, and motor checked over." He added curiously, "Going upstairs, sir?"

"As fast as you can get the ship on the line," Sampson said.

"Right, sir!" the sergeant replied. He shouted a few orders. Four huskies came on the double.

Sampson watched nervously as the Thunderbolt was rolled out of the hangar onto the moonlit field.

He forced himself to walk calmly towards it and then climbed into the cockpit.

A FLIGHT of land-based Grumman Wildcats were just taking off, their carrier lost in the fourth naval engagement that had ripped a sizeable chunk of sea power from the Nipponese war machine.

They cleared the field in a matter of minutes and roared out to sea.

Sampson adjusted his goggles with steady hands then, without waiting for the go-ahead orders from the operations shack, poured life into the Thunderbolt. The ear shattering roar of its eighteen cylinders was music to Sampson's ears.

He deliberately refrained from switching on his radio.

He wanted no orders to ground him at this point.

The motor droned into a steady purr as the ship warmed up. Then slamming the throttle to half gun, Sampson took off.

He was none too soon. In the eerie shadows of moonlight he saw the stocky sergeant running towards the plane waving his hands and shouting something that was lost in the fresh snarl of the motor.

Sampson grinned.

He had eight loaded guns, plenty of gas, and a desire to find the answer to a riddle that had been puzzling him for thirteen long months.

The Thunderbolt cleared the field nicely and skimmed up for altitude.

Sampson circled once—a sort of farewell gesture—then compassed for the northeast. It took him less than four minutes to climb to thirty thousand where he levelled off.

The noise of naval guns to the northwest were just dull throbs of sound at that height.

Sampson began to feel a deadly chill inside the cockpit. He switched on the heater. His throat felt tight and dry and he began to gasp a little for breath.

Switching on the oxygen feed, he found quick relief.

The ground crew had done a thorough job on the Thunderbolt. The motor never sounded sweeter.

Sampson switched on a panel light and taking a faded folded piece of paper from his jacket, spread it open. On its surface were series of lines and contours with navigational figures and data scrawled on the sides.

Sampson hadn't really needed that precious map. He had committed its contents to memory a long long time ago. Thirteen months had etched them indelibly into his brain.

Sampson Jones had plenty of time to think as the plane droned deeper and deeper into the thousands of miles of Jap mandated territory.

There was no turning back now.

Sampson Jones believed that the turning point of Jap conquest into defeat rested largely on this self-planned suicide mission of his.

The Navy had never solved the riddle of the front page sensation that had rocked the imagination of the world many months ago. . . .

On a bright June afternoon in 1939, a twin motored Douglas sky giant had taken off from Floyd Bennett Field, Long Island—apparently on a globe encircling span to gather a scientific study of human endurance on extended flight.

The last the world had heard of the Douglas and its four-man crew was a brief and tragic message from somewhere in the island studded waters of the South Pacific. There had been long hours of silence from the time the Douglas took off the sandy runway at Lae, New Guinea and pointed for the Howland Islands 2,550 miles to the east and just north of the equator. Then that terse message had echoed feebly and Japanese ships and planes threaded the waters of the southwest Pacific—in vain.

FOR two weeks the U. S. Navy had launched the most wide flung search in the history of aviation. American—and Japanese-ships and planes threaded the waters of the southwest Pacific—in vain.

The House Naval Affairs Committee had let out a public howl at the cost of the search.

Sampson Jones smiled grimly as his mind reviewed the tragically meagre facts the public were given about that search—and flight.

A slim, sandy haired man by the

name of Crawford Jones had been the navigator on that ill fated trip.

He was six years older than his brother, Sampson.

Crawford Jones had spent five years on scientific research for Princeton University in the Southwest Pacific.

He had also held a commission in the naval reserve—the same as his three companions.

The public didn't know that.

Sampson did.

He also knew that the University subsidy prior to that flight had been well screened camouflage.

Those Japanese mandated islands held many secrets the United States Navy of 1939 had been anxious to learn.

Sampson Jones, so he figured, had held one more secret the Navy might have used—but didn't because of circumstances that had taken the men who were interested in Crawford Jones and his ideas to other fields of naval duties.

Just before the start of that flight, Crawford Jones had given Sampson a sealed envelope.

"Just in case," he had said wryly. "During my many trips north of the Solomons, I found a tiny island. It would," he added, "Be of considerable value to the navy—in case of war."

Sampson had taken that data in the envelope to Washington at the outbreak of war. He had been politely but firmly kicked around.

The Navy, he was told, was not interested in the long and costly operations necessary to find and explore that island which only Crawford Jones had ever seen.

Fighting his plane through the stratosphere, Sampson Jones bubbled a little prayer on his lips.

There was a slim chance that Crawford Jones had reached his island and was waiting—waiting and preparing for the day when the vanguard of the American Fleet would steam into his

paradise and drop a solid anchor.

They were long odds with almost three years of silence beyond.

Sampson used his wizardry with aerial navigation to the top of his ability and skill.

Mileage and plenty of hours dropped away. The tanks were almost empty. Soon the emergency tank would be exhausted. After that—Sampson preferred not to think.

There was a haze of morning glow over the quiet sea when Sampson dropped downstairs for a look.

Minutes would tell the story now. His navigation, he knew, was faultless.

It was a crash or survive—and another unsolved riddle for both the army and navy to ponder over. Missing—in action! That had an ugly sound to it.

Sampson's course had veered slightly nor-northeast of the Gilbert Islands. His course was 173° 15' W—5° 35' N which would bring him almost in direct route with the more northerly Makin Island which the Navy had blasted in the early summer months of the war.

THE sea, from a ten thousand ceiling, looked glassy and devoid of enemy shipping.

Sampson anxiously checked his position again on the faded map and reckoned his dwindling gas supply. Enough for twenty minutes of flying yet.

He dared bring the Thunderbolt to three thousand.

An alert Jap 'fishing boat' could bring swift disaster. A quick radio flash to land based fighter planes—and extermination would be a merciless conclusion to the mad mission.

It didn't matter much either way, now.

Five anxious minutes fled. The sweat began to glisten on Sampson's pale face.

According to the map, he should be

nearing that island of Crawford Jones. His compass bearings were exact, his destination still unknown.

All at once, Sampson's heart lifted.

To the starboard wing he saw a blob of solidarity in the midst of that ever stretching sea.

The Thunderbolt took eagerly to the swift dive which Sampson executed, cutting the motor at the same time. He could glide precious miles and hoard the last drops of fuel remaining.

The fighter levelled at five hundred, sweeping the water's surface at two hundred miles per hour.

The blob of land grew bigger. It was, Sampson saw, guarded by dangerous shoals that extended out from its shores for half a mile all around.

The island was heavy with jungle growth and appeared to offer little prospect of a made-to-order landing strip. The beaches were washed into the jungle itself, jagged ribbon strips of white.

The momentum of the plane's speed began to diminish rapidly. Sampson hurriedly snapped the motor into life and reached for several hundred more ceiling.

Whether or not this was Crawford Jones' island, that made little difference now. Sampson needed doubtful haven—in a hurry.

He roared over the length of the island's east shore, eyes anxious to mark a landing place. Swept its five mile length and banked for a stab at the west shore.

The Thunderbolt began to cough and sputter.

Although still sweating—not from fear but more from a natural reaction to the situation he was in—Sampson was steady at the controls. The motor was choking badly now. There couldn't be much gas left.

Sampson refused to give up.

He nursed the Thunderbolt over the heavy jungle carpet beneath his wings

straining for a glimpse of anything flat and unobstructed that would offer half a chance to land.

Then suddenly he saw it! Ahead to the starboard wing was a slash of open ground. It was less than a hundred yards long and double width of the Thunderbolt.

Sampson cut the motor and eased in, killing the speed of the ship as much as he dared.

He barely dusted the tops of several thick foliaged trees and then came down. The wheels struck the rough carpet of earth. The Thunderbolt bounced and jarred with Sampson fighting to steady her. His arms ached from holding dead center course.

It took a man with over two thousand flying hours to make that landing.

SAMPSON braked less than ten feet from a tangled net of impenetrable underbrush.

A fierce glow burned inside of him for a moment then died away.

He had made it!

But the truth of his plight sank deeper. Hundreds of miles from nowhere on a dot of land with empty fuel tanks and a brand new sky fighter the Nips would have given much to lay their twitching hands on.

Sampson loosened the flap of his holster as he climbed from the plane. His fingers lingered over the stocky butt of the .45.

Around him was deep silence. It scared him a little.

He liked noise—plenty of it.

He did not wander far from his plane. Surely, if this island were inhabited the roar of the Thunderbolt dipping for a landing would have attracted attention.

That continuing silence began to get him.

Had he been insane after all—coming out here?

True, that flight back in 1939 had vanished from the minds of the world.

And even the navy had been eager, it had seemed to Sampson, to dismiss the whole tragic affair.

But Sampson refused to let his present situation lick him.

He was pinning a lot of faith on a relatively insignificant incident that had happened—thirteen months ago!

Sampson had run into an iron-faced man in Los Angeles. His name was King. He was something or other in the Navy. It didn't seem important—then.

He had known Crawford Jones—and Sampson, too.

The meeting had been brief. They had talked about Crawford Jones.

Then the iron-faced man had said, "I wouldn't worry too much about your brother, son." And had added a curious remark, "Men of his stamp don't die easily."

This fellow, King, had turned out to be a pretty important admiral.

As Sampson started to walk away from the Thunderbolt, one more curious thought crossed his mind. He had tried to piece it into that three year old puzzle.

On January 31st—nine weeks after the treacherous attack on Pearl Harbor, Navy bombers had taken off from a carrier on a special mission to Woje Island in the Marshalls group where they blasted *secret* Jap fortifications, leaving only smoking remains after them. **BUT NO AMERICAN SHIPS AND PLANES HAD PENETRATED EAST OF THE INTERNATIONAL DATELINE!**

Sampson Jones came back to earth with a jolt!

The awful silence around him was smashed by two hoarse words, uttered in **ENGLISH!**

"Don't move!"

Sampson gulped for several seconds

before he could find his paralyzed tongue. Then he cried out, "For Pete's sake, who ever you are, come out in the open!"

His knees were trembling as a giant figure carrying a submachine gun slid from behind a thick boled tree. His clothes, Sampson noticed with a start, looked fairly new. The man's features were blurred into a mass of bristly beard.

He came forward several paces, his suspicious submachine gun hip-leveled.

Sampson Jones did a strange thing. He suddenly brought himself stiffly erect and snapped a crisp salute at the bearded gunner.

"Lieutenant Jones, U. S. Army,, at your service," he said.

THE bearded stranger dropped the muzzle of his gun all at once and rushed forward.

"Harvey Richards, lieutenant U.S. Navy, at YOUR service, fella," he cried out. "And brother, whoever you are, you're a sight for sore eyes."

He swallowed Sampson's thin hand in a bear clutch.

Then he stared at the Thunderbolt. "Good god, man!" he gasped. "Where in hell and heaven did you come from?"

Sampson grinned back. His mind was spinning. He had done the impossible. And the Navy's best kept secret of the war was out—at last!

"Just dropped in from Guadalcanal," Sampson said lightly. "Plenty hot down there, and I don't mean the weather." His tongue was itching to cry out a hundred mad questions, but he held himself.

His mouth opened to cry out all at once.

From the jungle stepped three more men. They were likewise heavily bearded and armed with submachine guns.

One of them uttered a strangled cry

and stumbled in his haste to reach Sampson.

"Crawford!" Sampson finally gasped.

The slim figure, almost a counterpart of Sampson himself, threw his arms around Sampson and hugged tightly for a second.

Words were unnecessary.

"I knew it," Sampson cried out finally. "I knew I'd find you somehow—alive."

Crawford Jones, his thin chestnut burned features alive with controlled excitement nodded.

"I figured you were the one man in the world that could find this place," he said. And added, "But it's still a miracle."

He swiftly introduced the other two men. The short stocky man with a crooked scar over his left eye was Breck Thompson—U.S.N.

Sampson hardly recognized the man whose clear cut face had been front page for years as the smasher of all kinds of flying records. The other man was Jim Allison whose fame as an explorer had preceded his sudden development of interest in sky travel.

Sampson didn't waste time with questions that could come later. There was a job to be done first—get the Thunderbolt out of sight before a maurauding Jap spotted her on aerial reconnaissance.

The five men dragged the ship as close to the jungle as they could and camouflaged her with brush.

Then Sampson was taken into the jungle itself through a twisting man-made trail cleverly hidden from sky observation. He got another shock when Richards brought him to a well screened mass of seemingly impenetrable undergrowth and pulling aside a removable clump—led him into a semi-underground living quarters and operations building!

It was compact—and amazing. Crude shelves were lined with canned foods. There was a rack bristling with submachine guns—and on the far side—a complete radio station! Everything looked new and up to date.

Crawford explained in a few swift sentences.

"Despite your amazing feat, Sam, I'm afraid you've bungled a tremendously important job. This island is being used as a secret submarine base!"

Sampson gulped.

Crawford went on. "Now that you're here, you'll have to make the best of it. We'll have to notify the Navy, of course. A lot depends on our presence here remaining unknown to the enemy."

"No!" Sampson cried.

An insane idea seized him.

"Is there any chance of Jap planes spotting this place?"

CRAWFORD shrugged. "We've been lucky—so far. We're just far enough off the sea lanes from Makin and the Gilberts to be left alone. From past observations, air traffic rarely comes within two hundred miles of here."

Sampson's eyes were shining.

"Do you have plenty of fuel and ammunition?"

Crawford nodded. "We've prepared against the time when this island can be used as an air base for stepping off offensives to retake Wake as well as capture the Marshalls and Gilberts."

"That," Sampson said slowly, "is going to be just ducky. And I," he added quietly, "am going to be the eyes to keep the boys down the line informed of what's going on."

"You're insane," Richards broke in. "You not only stand a fine chance of being picked off, but you'd give this show away in forty eight hours."

Sampson grinned. "Brother, you,

you don't know me—or my ship," he said.

And meant just that.

The legend of the invisible phantom of the skies grew slowly at first. Hordes of thunderbolts later on made it live—to the terror of the Japs!

A Nakajima bomber returning to an atoll island base three hundred miles southeast of Makin Island crossed with the Devil's Own Spawn.

From out of a late afternoon sun a thousand feet above it, a grey splotched terror dove at three hundred miles per hour. Before the startled Jap crew could man its guns, a spray of death from eight lead-belching Brownings ripped the pilot's enclosure to shreds.

Sampson Jones and his Thunderbolt whipped up and sprayed the faltering belly of the Nakajima with another long burst and skidded madly out of the way.

The deadly accuracy of those two attacks were enough

The Nakajima burst into flames and went exploding into the sea.

Twenty four hours later a huge Jap seaplane cruising the sky lanes a hundred and ninety miles northeast of Sampson's secret base got a taste of this one man sky armada.

Lurking in the clouds at eighteen thousand, Sampson spotted the big flying boat half a mile below him and due west.

He prepared for battle with a cool, deadly efficiency.

With the sun at his back—that same late afternoon sun—he gunned up and went after his prey, tumbling from his balcony seat when less than five hundred yards separated him from the seaplane.

He put the Thunderbolt into a steep, screaming dive that would bring him head-on with the enemy. His strategy was sound. With the sun in their eyes,

the Japs would not suspect attack so deep in their own waters—until it was too late.

Closer and closer he came to the soaring yellow-bird, unaware of its danger.

He struck with ruthless power.

Machine guns deadly at five hundred yards were murderous at two hundred.

Hours of untiring practice at Eglin Field which Sampson had wangled his superiors into allowing him, showed terrible results. The first blast of fire raked the seaplane from prop to tail.

THEN Sampson was hurtling over it. He zoomed, looped, and came down for another crack at the panic-stricken crew.

A feeble crackle of machine gunning from the tail of the Jap missed Sampson by twenty five yards.

He came in fast, chattering his guns with the seaplane squarely in his ring sight.

Lead from the tail beat futilely into the Thunderbolt's fuselage as it shot up again. The Jap started to smoke. Then flames burst from beneath the cowling.

Sampson banked and swung in a wide circle to finish the enemy menace.

Sampson came in from behind.

He held his fire until the ring sight framed the tail gunner for precious seconds. Despite the hail of lead smacking around him, Sampson held his course, then mashed savagely on the trigger button.

The Brownings snarled for fifteen seconds.

The tail gunner of the seaplane leaped to join his unhonorable ancestors.

The burst ripped the tail assembly to shreds.

Sampson climbed five hundred feet above the stricken Jap and watched grimly as the ship peeled off and went

spinning helplessly into the sea.

Then he made a strange gesture.

His right hand left the controls long enough to execute a light salute followed by a clenched fist.

Sampson Jones' private war of extermination had a sound motivation.

He was a simple, peace loving man.

But he had attended a special lecture one day for officers at Eglin Field. The speaker was an AP correspondent who had escaped from Hong Kong a week after its fall.

The description of the correspondent's eye witness accounts of the debauchery that had followed Hong Kong's capitulation had chilled Sampson. He had once seen a dog whipped to death.

Sampson Jones had sworn vengeance for the awful butchery of helpless women by the lustful yellow devils.

He brought the Thunderbolt safely to the island and made a perfect landing on the much improved landing strip.

"Good hunting?" Allison, the explorer, asked him eagerly. His critical eyes swept the slightly bullet-pocked ship.

"Everything quiet," Sampson said, and added modestly, "Ran into a Jap seaplane by accident."

Allison's broad features crinkled.

"Richards is waiting for a report," he said. "We've been listening to the Nips chatter on the radio all day."

All four men of this tight little expedition had a fair knowledge of Japanese. The powerful island station had many vital facts to give the occasional American subs that thus far had used the base sparingly.

Sampson got a long range Nakajima the following afternoon. He had a tough time. The Japs put up a stiff fight. They got part of the Thunderbolt's tail and sliced a chunk out of the left wing.

The bomber was equipped with .50 calibre machine guns and got two of them working before Sampson, with utter disregard for his own skin, turned the one in the tail to junk.

The Nakajima was stubborn. Sampson finally downed it with a lucky burst in the left fuel tank. The ship blew up with a terrific roar.

But not before the crew radio operator got through a message to Makin warning of American fighters in the area.

SAMPSON was tired when he set down the Thunderbolt on Roosevelt Island—thusly christened by the quartet of adventurers who had made a crash landing there three years before.

Crawford was bubbling with news.

"You've done it this time, Sam," he said quietly. "The Japs are ripping the air waves apart. We'll be having company around here soon."

Breck Thompson rubbed a hand thoughtfully over the crooked scar above his eye.

"It's about time for the Sea Gull to come in," he said, referring to one of the subs that had been using the base infrequently. "The Japs have something in the wind. The air waves have been jammed today." He glanced at Sampson a moment. "That plane of yours will be mighty handy . . . now."

The one-man air force grinned back. "I'd give my eye teeth for a few torpedoes right now." He sighed. "There's one hell of a lot of work left unfinished."

The members of the island garrison had tactfully avoided the painful subject of Sampson's possible AWOL. There would be time for that—later . . . when the Sea Gull arrived and could report back to Allied HQ.

To send a message by radio would

spell doom for the island base.

As Crawford had predicted, the Japs spent a busy twenty-four hours combing the waters for miles around Roosevelt Island for a trace of the Sky Phantom.

The Thunderbolt was securely camouflaged against prying eyes, and the men kept to their secret quarters.

Four times, big Nipponese flying boats circled the island, searching for signs of the invader. Each time the drone of the powerful Mitsubishi-Kinsei engines hummed overhead, the navy quartet held their breath. Much depended on the future strategy of the Gilberts-Marshalls area in keeping that base secret.

It was late afternoon when the final hum of enemy motors died in the distance.

Sampson was restless from the long vigil.

"I think," he announced, "I shall take a constitutional early tomorrow morning. A breath of sea air will do me good."

"Be rather dangerous right now," Richards said. "The Japs will be on the lookout. I'd suggest layoff for a few days."

Sampson shook his head. "I've got to see what's going on," he said. "Remember, I'm the eyes of this outfit now. The Japs won't be expecting me. I'll take my chances."

Jim Allison looked up from the butt of a submachine gun he had been polishing.

He removed a stubby briar from between his teeth and said dryly, "Patience is quite a trick . . . when it counts the most. We've had quite a go of it for three years."

Sampson flushed. "Sorry," he said quickly.

He remembered with a flash that night two weeks ago at the Miami Biltmore and the soft music and tinkle

of glasses.

These fellows had taken a lot of solitary punishment to do a job.

Thompson, at the radio controls, suddenly pushed back his earphones.

He reached quickly for a thin, leatherbound book on a crude table at his elbow, thumbed the pages rapidly, then adjusted the earphones securely again.

THE others waited patiently while he scribbled furiously on a pad. Thompson was usually the most reserved of the quartet.

His eyes were bright when he finally snapped off the switch and laid the earphones aside.

"Got a message the Nips were sending in code Z," he said grimly. "Destroyer, probably, talking to shore installations. The devils are up to something, all right."

"I'm going upstairs in the morning," Sampson said.

There were no objections.

Once darkness had settled over the island, Sampson with the help of Thompson and Allison, who had a fair knowledge of planes, worked steadily through long hours of moonlight to service the Thunderbolt for the dawn patrol.

The ship was ready by midnight.

Exhausted, the men turned in for a few hours of sleep—they never got.

At twenty minutes to one, a sleek hulled submarine surfaced close to the island shore.

The Sea Gull had returned!

Four men, including Reynard, the twenty-four-year-old commander of the tin fish, came ashore in a rubber boat.

Sampson experienced a tingling sensation with the meeting of these daredevil undersea raiders. The Sea Gull, twice reported overdue, had five Jap destroyers and three transports to her

credit.

Reynard and his men remained less than an hour. They took on fresh water and barely enough oil to replenish a quarter of her dwindling supply.

The information supplied by the island personnel was disturbing. The Sea Gull was going out on reconnaissance. Two thirds of her torpedoes were still intact!

Sampson remained inconspicuously in the background of conversation. The others made no attempt to explain his presence there.

The Sea Gull had been at sea for ten days.

Once the sleek hull of the pigboat slid beneath the waters again, Sampson felt a growing desire to get aloft.

He sensed it inside somehow that the next few days would be epochal in this deadly war of extermination.

Darkness was just starting to lift its blanket from the island when Sampson got ready to leave.

Camouflage had been removed from the Thunderbolt. It stood in naked magnificence against the brightening sky.

Crawford walked on ahead towards the ship with Sampson.

"We'll be waiting for your return, Sam," he said quietly.

Sampson Jones felt a sudden tight gnawing at his stomach. He couldn't find the words, but somehow he knew he wouldn't be returning—this time.

He knew that the fantastic adventure he had lived was about ended.

Thousands of miles across the Pacific an important job was waiting for him at Eglin Field.

He had known all along he would have to go back some time.

That was his job in this man sized war—giving the glory and hell boys the sort of ships it was going to take to smash the yellow invaders.

This was no time for dramatics.

Sampson simply climbed into the Thunderbolt, kicked the self starter, and took off over the jungle roof several minutes later.

He circled the island once, dipped his wings in final salute, and pointed for the north.

AT twenty thousand, the air was cold. Sampson turned on the heater. He compassed in a direct line for the Gilberts.

For three quarters of an hour he held his ceiling. Then abruptly, he nosed down.

It was time to go in work.

The morning sun had broken through heavy white clouds. Sampson changed his course slightly east-northeast.

He got it sooner than he had figured.

Cruising down around five thousand, he spotted movement on the still waters below.

Sampson peeled off for a look.

At twenty-five hundred he saw them! A flotilla of seven Jap torpedo boats heading south.

The Japs saw him at the same time.

Machine guns opened up with a stinging blast.

Scoring hits on a target diving at three hundred and twenty-five miles per hour was another thing.

Sampson aimed for the nearest craft.

Lead whistled all around the Thunderbolt, but he held steady. At three hundred yards, he ringed the torpedo boat in his sights and mashed the trigger button.

The Brownings screamed a long burst.

The torpedo boat seemed to erupt into a blinding curtain of fire all at once.

Tracer stuff had found its torpedoes.

Sampson zoomed with Jap bullets peppering him like salt pouring from a shaker.

As he dove again, his guns flaring at another victim, the craft scattered formation. Sampson kept after his target with grim persistence. He saw two of the four man crew flop lifelessly. The engine suddenly showed spurs of flame and heavy smoke.

Sampson wasted no more time on the scattered flotilla.

He was after bigger game.

Fifty miles west of the deadly Tom Thumb fleet—he ran smack into the biggest jam of his life.

Winging at four thousand ceiling, deliberately looking for trouble, he spotted an unending ribbon of smoke extending for miles towards the Gilberts rendezvous.

And that wasn't all!

Less than two miles to his starboard wing, a huge formation of fighter-escorted bombers were heading south.

They hadn't spotted him yet.

Sampson swept in a wide circle, diving into a bank of clouds. He had to chance that powerful air armada to find out the answer to that line of smoke, although a funny sensation in the pit of his stomach had already given him the answer.

The clouds were merciful and screened him for several precious miles.

Then abruptly he burst into sunlight—and saw a terrifying sight.

To his right and below was a battleship of the Kongo class, flanked by four fast destroyers. And as far back as he could see were more ships of the Jap line.

THE snower smacked home clearly now.

A final all-out attempt to retake Guadalcanal!

The yellow devils were throwing everything they had into the maneuver.

A blossom of white erupted suddenly on his port wing.

He had been spotted!

For three terrible minutes, The Thunderbolt took a furious ack-ack pounding from all five of the nearest warships.

It was too close for comfort!

The Thunderbolt, screaming for precious ceiling received the smashing impact of a shell that ripped into the starboard wing. Another tore a gash in the cowling inches from the cockpit. Shrapnel fragments exploding smashed into the cockpit itself.

Sampson got a nasty gash that laid open four inches of his right cheek.

He could feel the stinging numbness and the wetness of his blood streaming down his chin.

He was too keyed up to notice that the bleeding stopped several minutes later. The gash was not deep. Just painful.

He grabbed every bit of ceiling he could get with the ack-ack whistling all around him.

At fifteen thousand he ran into fresh trouble.

A new Jap formation burst through a peel of clouds five hundred yards to his starboard. The formation split into threes and came after the Thunderbolt to smash it in a tight pincers.

The enemy planes, a quick glance told Sampson, were Zeros.

He was in for it!

Now more than ever he prayed that the Thunderbolt would live up to its test flights of almost-invincibility.

The shattered wing was giving Sampson trouble. But that snarling motor had a full heart thrown into the tough job that lay ahead.

The needle was creeping to twenty-five thousand.

At that ceiling the Thunderbolt was at its top performance.

The Zeros darted in fast, guns already fainting to smoke out the lone invader.

The Nip tactics were sound and deadly—but the one weakness of the Japs saved Sampson from swift annihilation—that notoriously poor marksmanship in close quarters combat.

The Thunderbolt took the full power of the withering cross fire. The ship shuddered from the hits but remained aloft. The super-armor it carried stood the crucial test.

Sampson zoomed and flipped over, catching the belly of an over-anxious Jap in the surprise maneuver.

Sampson's guns screamed the defiant challenge of a cornered wildcat.

He ripped the belly of the Zero to pieces. It slid into a half spin—crashed wing-on with another Zero coming up for a stab from behind.

That hit-and-run battle lasted for twenty minutes. Again and again the Thunderbolt shuddered from the impact of cannon fire.

But the ship had nerve and guts to equal its pilot.

Two more Zeros went out of action, both badly hit.

The remaining six shied away from the mastac defying their efforts to crush him. They circled and sparred for an opening in that armor-clad defense.

Two things saved Sampson—a forty thousand ceiling to which the Thunderbolt had fought its way and a ceiling not to the liking of the Japs with their lighter craft—and their fast dwindling supply of gasoline.

THEY sheered off suddenly and left the Thunderbolt to lick its wounds.

Sampson was almost exhausted. And his guns were dry! He had used the last of his ammunition to blast futilely at an elusive Zero trying to come in close for the kill it never quite made.

With the realization of that powerful Jap fleet steaming towards Guadalcanal, Sampson had only one thought

in mind now — give warning — and damn the cost!

Roosevelt Island was out! With Jap ships and planes thick as flies in the area, that base had to be protected from detection!

Sampson glanced at the fuel indicator—half full!

The odds were mounting!

He flicked on the radio switch—to a dead set. Jap lead had settled that!

Sampson gritted his teeth . . . and shot the works!

He held the Thunderbolt at a thirty thousand ceiling until the fuel indicator dropped to the quarter mark. Then nosing down, he struck for five thousand.

He was fighting for time now.

The fuel dropped lower and lower.

Sampson's course was slightly south-west of Guadalcanal.

How far from it he had no idea. Part of his instrument panel was shattered.

But there was a slim chance left before he dropped into the sea.

With four minutes gas supply left, he spotted smoke on the horizon south-southwest.

The American fleet?

Sampson mumbled an almost forgotten prayer.

This was it!

The smoke became clearer as he forced his faltering ship on. Then he could make out the trim lines of a destroyer. There were two more in its wake.

Sampson felt like screaming. *Yanks!*

He came down carefully—held his breath as the nearest destroyer, a quarter mile away, started to change its course.

Would they open fire?

A pair of powerful binoculars on the bridge saved Sampson from being a clay pigeon over a watery shooting gallery.

He circled the destroyer once, then deliberately settled down for a crash landing, unbuckling his safety belt at the same time.

He pancaked beautifully and following seconds of stunned shock from the crash, clawed away the cockpit enclosure. He remembered throwing himself clear of the Thunderbolt seconds before it sank. . . .

Sampson Jones spent two months in an Australian base hospital healing four broken ribs and a smashed ankle.

He woke up to life one sunny afternoon expecting the world and a military court to crash around him.

A three day battle during which half of the powerful Jap fleet was destroyed thanks to the information Sampson Jones had blurted from half unconscious lips had a lot to do with the broad aspect under which the case was reviewed.

A secret Naval conference at Sampson's bedside followed.

There was also a bronze twist of medal.

Sampson turned it down.

"Save it," he begged the array of gold braid, "And add three more to it. There are four swell guys I'd like to give them to personally some day."

It was like an iron-faced man, who was an admiral by the name of King, had once told Sampson.

Men like Crawford Jones, Harvey Richards, Jim Allison, Breck Thompson—they didn't die easily.

And Sampson Jones was certainly no hero. He was just a guy trying to do a job the best he knew how.

THE REBEL ACE

By

LESLIE B. LUECK

Flying fortresses were famous for taking care of themselves against attacking Nazi Focke-Wulf's, and Flight Commander Lee Grigg didn't figure he'd get to be an ace very fast furnishing fighter escort!



Another F.W. 190 was going down, a dead pilot at the controls!

FLIGHT Commander Lee Grigg of the American Eagle's Seventy-two Squadron, barked into his R.T., "Dawson, take over!"

From all about him in Green Flight, Grigg heard meaningful murmurs coming over the inter-com. Let them talk!

He was going solo hunting.

He pulled the plug on his Spitfire. From twenty thousand feet the Spitt caromed out Hunland skies, Merlin screaming insanely.

Up above, with Dawson now leading, Green Flight continued, with as

much composure as it could muster. Its mission was to meet a couple B-17s this side of sector R-11 and escort them home from a night raid. Dawn was just breaking.

"Damned braced-off job!" Grigg swore resentfully. The Flying Fortresses were notoriously capable of taking care of themselves very efficiently.

Grigg's bleak eyes stared at a speck he'd seen to his right. He rammed the stick down and the throttle open. Wards formed, unconsciously, between Grigg's clenched teeth. "Hope it's von Schacht this time," he ground out.

RAPIDLY, the speck grew into a Focke-Wulf 190, its blunt sinister nose flushed a dull yellow; a black zig-zag limned on its silver fuselage side. It was von Schacht's private color scheme. Moreover, the yellow nose indicated Gering's pet *Jadestaffel*.

The sun was a fire-ball behind Grigg. The German hadn't see him—yet.

Suddenly, Grigg leaned forward, tuned his R.T. to the *Luftwaffe* band. "Von Schacht!" he roared into his flap mike. "*Da verdammter Scheiss! Remember Winston!*"

The effect on the Focke-Wulf was instant. While Grigg fiddled with the radio, the German simply disappeared.

—Whang! Shards from the bullet-pocked greenhouse showered Grigg's head. For a split instant, he regretted having given the German a chance. Yet, he didn't want to shoot the man in the back. Not even this murderous, sly enemy; one who justly deserved nothing but death.

The ominous cr-r-rump of a Nazi air cannon shell exploding on Grigg's rear armor, sent the American reeling into the instrument panel.

Earth and sky swam along with black dots in Grigg's vision. The rest of his pants slewed one way, his eyes another

way. He hauled himself into his seat, battling centrifugal force and shock.

Behind him, Luft Fuehrer von Schacht was screaming in for his forty-sixth kill!

The German was holding his fire, coming in slower.

Grigg grinned mirthlessly, allowing his head to loll on the greenhouse pane. He feigned a hit. But his glance into the rear view mirror was sharp.

Like bolt lightning, he slammed the Spit around.

The Focke-Wulf raged obliquely past, guns bathed in flame, off-centre.

The American laughed aloud. "It worked!" he shouted. "Here comes a ticket to Hell, Fritzle-boy!" His thumb pressed on the m.g. control. Eight guns yammered a devil's tattoo into the yellow beaked F.W.

Then Grigg's smile froze. His guns stopped chattering! A glance at the indicator showed him why. No juice. Some of the Nazi's lead had evidently found a home in the electric system which fired the guns.

The German didn't know that, however. He was streaking away as fast as his BMW radial's 14 cylinders could explode gas. Grigg howled in rage. For eight long weeks now, he had been fruitlessly solo-hunting for the F.W. with the dirty yellow nose. Breaking every rule in the Air Marshall's book, inviting the scorn of the entire Seventy-second Squadron. Drawing sharp rebukes from the baffled C.O. And now the blasted hound was fleeing!

"Damn you!" Grigg roared. Flipping the throttle to full coal, he headed the Spit straight for the Focke-Wulf's tail surfaces! "I'll crush the double-deckled so-and-so's fin off!" he muttered.

NOT for nothing was the German Hitler's greatest ace, Grigg realized, then. The F.W. put on a burst

of speed that left Grigg's eyebrows up. The Heine was all over the sky like a crazy rocket, twisting and squirming. He was also bawling loudly for help into his mike.

With a last desperate poke at the unresponsive gun-button, Grigg hiked the Spit around to the west. Von Schacht was his quarry, not half of Mr. Goering's personal fighters.

Grigg brought the Spit to a waddling halt on the Seventy-second's drome. McDougal, his mechanic and Pete, his armorer, didn't come darting up as usual. "Hey, Mac!" Grigg called. "What's wrong?"

Mac's dour Scot's face appeared beside the pit. The little mech's mouth opened fish-like. He closed it again, a queer stare in his black eyes. He scratched a scrubby yellow beard. "Ye are in dutch again, sir-r," he offered sadly.

Grigg looked around. A group of Green Flight pilots stood stiffly along a rail fence, also staring. Grigg leapt out, prickles running down his spine. He bumped into someone. "Hi, Dawson," he said. "Why all the fishy looks? Have I got leprosy?"

Dawson had his sleek dark head bent, touching a frayed bit of canvas that had protected one of Grigg's m.g. muzzles.

Dawson said, evenly, "I see you fired. For a minute, I thought you'd set your Spit down in Hunland to have beer with Goering—Grigg—or *whatever* your name is!"

Grigg's face went white. His hand shot out, grabbed Dawson's tunic. He gritted, "What do you mean by that last crack?"

Dawson sneered. "I've seen you before somewhere. Only then your name was not Grigg."

McDougal, the mech, hastily interrupted. "Beggin' the Commander's pardon, the C.O. wants him to r-report,

immediately."

Cursing, Grigg headed for the office. Hostilely, greaseballs and pilots made way for him. What the devil was the matter with them all?

"Grigg," Major Sam Masters said gravely, "I must do this. You've left your flight once too often. You are grounded for two weeks. All leaves will be canceled. You will stay on this drome."

Again Grigg's face whitened. "Leaves canceled? You can't—"

"Can't I?" the C.O. grimaced. He got up, savagely fingering a flight report. "Listen, Grigg! Higgins and Grimshaw of Green Flight are dead. Dead—do you hear me? Also, one of the B-17's is missing. They ran into a flock of M.E.'s while you were skylarking."

Grigg flinched. "But, Dawson—" "Dawson," flared Major Masters, spacing each word like a terrible whip-lash, "is not as experienced as you. Particularly on a bomber-escort job. The next time you leave your flight, you'll be out of the Eagles!"

Grigg's mouth was horribly dry as he walked across the road to his quarters. He understood now, only too well, why the personnel avoided him. He kept thinking of the two Spits that had gone down, and of the Fort that would never return.

IN HIS room, he poured himself a stiff gin and grinned faintly at a picture of a pretty girl that stood on his table. Her eyes, gray like his own, stared back at him. Grigg's teeth clicked together. "Hi, Maris," he told the picture casually. "Be seein' you tonight."

That done, he put on his cap jauntily, and stepped out into the late afternoon. The house was quite some distance from the drome. Leave or no, he was going places! In a rear shed stood a motor-bike the Intelligence

Officer of the drome frequently used. Casually, Grigg mounted it and headed off in the direction of London.

When Grigg returned that evening, he wasn't particularly surprised to see Major Masters waiting for him.

The C.O. spat disgustedly. "Grigg, you're *drunk!*"

Grigg shook his touseled head. "No, Major," he sighed regretfully, "only a little piped. Didn't have time for a real spree."

"I don't know why you're so happy about it!" the C.O. exploded. "If we had a guard house, I'd have you thrown into it. Since honor apparently means nothing to you, you will be confined to your quarters until I decide what shall be done. I'm leaving the field. I shall be back to deal with you tomorrow afternoon."

Grigg saluted, unsteadily. The C.O. continued, "During the night, this man will guard you with orders to shoot if you attempt to leave!"

McDougal's unhappy visage swam into Grigg's slightly unfocused view. A .45 big as a horsepistol hung limply in a holster about McDougal's skinny hips. Major Masters stamped angrily away. "Why did ye do it, mon?" the little Scot pleaded, almost in tears. "Why dinna ye obey or-rders? Are ye daft?"

Grigg clapped the Scot's back. "Stop your blubbering, Mac. Tonight, hell—I feel almost happy. If I start singing, just fire that howitzer through the door!"

Ground Sergeant McDougal snuffled. "I know what ails ye," he muttered darkly. "Aye. Women—that's where ye was—a curse upon the pack o' them!"

Grigg smiled. "Maybe you're right, Mac. Righter than you know."

Grigg shut his door, made sure the blackout curtains covered the windows. He snatched the light and

staggered back, jests forgotten. His strong box stood on the table, its lock a twisted bit of metal.

Feverishly, Grigg shook it. The box was empty!

"Mac!" he shouted, voice cracking. "*Mac!*"

"Aye?" the Scotsman answered cautiously.

"Mac—listen, you've got to let me out of here, you understand? I've got to—" he broke off, staring wildly around the room. "I've been robbed!"

McDougal coughed politely. "Lie doon and sleep it off, mon. Aye. T'will do ye gude."

Though the little Scot was his best pal, Grigg knew nothing on earth could budge the guy's sense of duty.

RIGIDLY, Grigg recalled the damning papers from the strong box. Papers which told his true identity. Gone! Mirthlessly, he remembered his American draft card which read, "Gordon Robert Winslow." And his passport would give away his true age, 43. Another paper identified him as former Chief Test Pilot of the American Yankee Aircraft Corp.

He saw down on the bed, head in his hands. Someone had those papers! But—who?

Mechanically, he broke out his safety razor to shave off the beard he'd acquired during the last few hours. He stared at his face, which did look blandly, absurdly young. It had enabled him to join the Eagles, under the name of Lee Grigg, age 25—and get into active combat. Now the ride was over.

"No, by God!" he gritted. "I'll get von Schacht yet—somehow!"

The British and the Americans still had an idea that Rikkard von Schacht was something of a gentleman. During the early days of the war the Nazi every day appeared over Eng-

land, alone. And, he could fly; of that there was no question.

Grigg rolled uneasily into bed.

Maybe the Britishers and the Yanks still liked to believe in fairy tales. For, most of von Schacht's victories weren't won in equal sky combat. Most of them were triumphs over green pilots or crippled fighters. That was why von Schacht flew alone—to pick off lame ducks.

Grigg closed his eyes, trying to woo sleep. That wasn't the only reason why the German must be smashed down. The Nazi was guilty of a crime as besmirched as hell itself, for which he must pay. Grigg opened his eyes momentarily, peered at the dark picture sitting on the dark table, and smiled before he went to sleep. It was not a pleasant smile.

Gray pre-dawn filtered into the room, when Grigg awoke. Somebody was rapping at the door. "Mac?" Grigg asked. He swung his legs to the floor, listening. Finally getting no answer, he said, "Come!"

Dawson, attired in his awkward flying suit, entered.

"Thought I'd drop in and see how the black sheep's getting on. I'm in charge while the C.O. is gone." His narrowed black eyes appraised Grigg. "So your name is really Winslow, eh? I *thought* I'd seen you before. What's your game?"

Grigg tensed, an idea beginning to take form. The more he thought of it, the more he liked it. He laughed grimly.

"You ransacked my room. You—"

"Yes. The C.O. detailed me to do so, after you went AWOL last night. The contents of the box were very interesting, weren't they, Grigg? Mind if I keep calling you Grigg? We fellows are sort of used to it."

Grigg flared. "What do you want?"

Dawson swaggered to the re-

the room, lifting the curtains high. "You might like to know, Grigg, that the C.O. knows that you were masquerading under another man's name. The papers are waiting for him on his desk. There'll be a thorough investigation."

Grigg suddenly yelled, "Get out of here!"

Dawson cursed. "Why do you lie about yourself?"

GRIGG carefully set his right foot behind his left, gripping the edge of the bed, ready to spring. Dawson was coming closer, chin thrust out.

Grigg leapt up! The top of his head collided satisfyingly with Dawson's stuck-out chin. The spring carried them both backwards. Dawson uttered a strangled, "McDougal! Hel—!"

Snarling, Grigg pushed his hand over the young fighter pilot's mouth, silencing him. By instinct, rather than sight, he knew Dawson was going for his Webley. Desperately, he tried to trip Dawson up, meanwhile trying to drag Dawson's right fist away from the pistol.

Then Dawson broke away completely. "You dirty rat!" he swore, half in anger, half in another emotion. Grigg saw the youngster's pale face was working—why, the so-and-so was near tears!

Before Dawson could jerk the flap off his holster, Grigg hit him. "Sorry," he said.

The husky youth bounced up into the air and came down on the table carrying it crashingly along with him to the floor. Dawson was completely cold.

Calmly, Grigg waded in, appropriated the Webley. He tossed it contemptuously beneath a pillow on the bed.

He got the suit off Dawson's

inert form. Quickly, Grig slipped the issue of his dress pants and tied it securely about Dawson's wrists. He rolled the youngster on his side.

He was just getting into Dawson's thick suit, when he detected footsteps prowling around outside. Evidently, Mac had heard some of the racket. Grigg finished getting his arms into the flying suit's sleeves and quietly, he tiptoed to the hinge side of the door.

McDougal barged in without knocking. "Lieutenant Dawson!" he was saying. "What—" Then he saw the prone figure on the floor. The little Scot's eyes flew wide.

Grigg closed the door with one arm and encircled Mac with the other firmly from behind. "Morning, Mac," he greeted cheerily. "Won't you join the party?"

Grinningly, Grigg clamped fingers on a nerve in the Scot's right wrist. Mac yelled, and his pistol clattered to the floor. Grigg spun him around. Blank consternation wreathed the Scot's broad face. Shakily, he wiped his forehead.

"Hae I nae seen it wit' my own eyes, I'd nae believe it!" he mumbled. "Ye deliber-ately attacked me!"

"Keep quiet, Mac," Grigg told him. "I haven't got all day to explain things to you."

There was a large closet in the room. Gently, Grigg shoved Mac into it and slammed the door. He turned the key, dropped it into his pocket. Inside, the Scot mechanic raved and swore. English houses, built for warmth and for strength, had thick mason walls. No one would likely hear Mac's cries.

Out on the line Merlins roared intermittently; Green Flight was getting set to scramble!

gine ticking over, was out there, ready.

Dawson's crew stepped respectfully aside as Grigg pounded up. They thought he was Dawson, and Grigg could tell from the solicitous care with which they'd laid out the cote that they held their pilot in high regard.

Grigg was just pulling shut the canopy, when commotion burst about his plane. Dawson had broken loose! The young pilot thrust aside his bewildered crew, attired in his undies. With a bound, Dawson was on the wingstep.

Grigg reached out, putting the heel of his hand against the lad's chin. He heaved. Dawson tumbled off. With his right hand, Grigg poured on the coal. The Spitter howled, careening down the field, leaving behind it a smoking tail of dust.

He climbed in a fast turn, buzzed the field at thirty feet, on his way to Hunland.

Below, he could spot the half naked figure of Dawson tearing off the flying suit of a comrade. Dawson, it seemed, wanted to come along.

Grigg glared balefully at the air speed. Only 350. This can wasn't as fast as his own, but it would have to do. Frowning, he set his course for Sector R-11, von Schacht's stamping grounds.

The German probably would be upstairs, alone, waiting hopefully for some stragglers.

The Big Ditch rippled below, greyly; and off his right wingtip lay what had once been Dieppe. He worked the mixture adjustment, hoping to get a bit more r.p.m. out of the slow Spitter.

He tuned in Green Flight on the radio. Suddenly, in his startled ears crackled Dawson's voice, "Here Grigg is, boys! I've spotted the —! He's right below me!"

Grigg's neck swiveled up and around as he peered through the sun-bleached fields of his goggles. A Spit, prob-

GRIGG ran out of his quarters, pulling Dawson's helmet, phones and oxygen mask on. Dawson's kite, prob-

ably with Dawson in it, was perhaps a mile to the rear, glinting in the early light.

Another voice, which he recognized as a lad named Henderson, sounded, "Where are you, Dawson? Sit on his — tail, until we get there."

"Over Sector R-11," Dawson's voice swam out of the ether. "Going after him."

The wings of Dawson's crate flashed as he peeled off in the sun. He was directly above now. Moaning like a human in pain, Dawson's Merlin merged with the thunder of Grigg's Spit. Like a cannonball, Dawson arced past Grigg's screw. Grigg heard a brief clatter of Dawson's Vickers.

Something went spango! and Grigg, hypnotized, saw crimped holes sprout in the cowl before his windscreen. Damned good shooting! Grigg grimaced. The kid was altogether too good. Dawson was coming back, behind. Dawson's nose was momentarily up, so he couldn't see Grigg's Spit.

"Hope this doesn't deflate Dawson's ego," Grigg quote. "Hold everything!"

WITH a flip and a prayer that his belts would hold, Grigg stuck the Spit's nose down and under—in an outside loop!

For a second, Grigg thought he'd be cut in half by the safety belt around his middle. Earth and sky whirled sickeningly. A glycol pipe must have leaked, for an evil gas seeped into the greenhouse, making Grigg's eyes smart. Then the Spit was down and up, up, into a cloud layer.

Before he angled into it, he grinned at Dawson's Spit stooging bewilderedly around below.

"Whew!" Grigg snorted. He opened the canopy to let the glycol fumes out. The phones crackled again; this time it was Dawson's voice:

"Grigg, where are you? Hope

didn't hit you—damned wind current tossed my kite about while I shot. Only meant to herd you back. Go back, man! My God—"

The rest was cut off by drilling m.g. fire which Grigg could plainly hear in the phone. Snatches of buzzing, rocketing drone sounded, along with Dawson's cussing. Plainly, Dawson was in a dogfight!

Then, he saw it!

About a layer below, two planes were madly a-whirl, like two flies in a bottle. One of them was Dawson's kite. And the other was a Focke-Wulf with a dirty-yellow nose and a silver fuselage with black zig-zags.

"Von Schacht!" Grigg's cry was half scream and half roar. His fingers clawed about the stick. He flipped over out of the blue and went hurtling down, down, like remorseless Death in flight.

Grigg set his gun control, snapped home the cocking handles and turned on the electric sight. Hardly had he done this, when he saw Dawson's Spit staggering drunkenly, as though the youngster were hit. Bits of metal and fabric were shedding from the blasted Spit.

There was no doubt about the Nazi's superiority. Probably, at the moment he was already getting ready to hang another Eagle insignia in his baronial halls somewhere in Hunland.

GRIGG batted his R.T. to the German's band. "Remember me, von Schacht?" he shouted into the transmitter. "The name's Winslow! You must have heard it before! The name must be familiar. Remember the Winslow you shot down on October 15th, 1941? En garde!"

The Focke-Wulf lurched as though touched with high tension wires! It left the weakening Spit and flung lazily around. The engines and guns roar-

ing and pounding. Milky tracer streams swept and criss-crossed the high blue sky.

Grigg could hear him screaming in the phones, "*Ich bin mit einem geist!*"

"You'll think I'm more than a ghost before I'm through, you damned killer!" Grigg ground out.

His thumb crashed down the firing button. Eight Vickers crackled their Song of Doom. And then it happened!

Suddenly the atmosphere filled with black crossed ships. Goering's own had arrived to help von Schacht out! Spandau lead raged and BMW engines made the morning sky a hell on earth.

From God knew where, another Spit hurled itself into the picnic; Grigg briefly recognized it as Dawson's. Good old Dawson!

"Give 'em hell!" Grigg roared.

Together, the two Spits maneuvered—two against six! Vickers at bay snarled until red hot.

One Focke-Wulf was balling down, its 1600 h.p. radial streaming a geyser of rippling flame and smoke. Grigg twinkled by, so close that he believed he could hear the crackling of this Satan's pyre.

Another F.W.190 was going down, wobbling aimlessly from side to side, a dead pilot at the controls.

"Two down and four to go!" Grigg roared.

Yet even in the heat of the hurdy-gurdy, he knew he was kidding himself. One slow Spit and another nicked Spit were no match for four of Goering's finest, which included von Schacht! Sooner or later—

Then Grigg let out an earsplitting yell!

Another Spit joined them—now another and still another! Green Flight had arrived!

Out of a corner eye, Grigg

a Focke-Wulf tear itself out of the scrum and going the hell out of there. "Von Schacht!" Grigg shouted.

The murderous ace was getting away!

It was now or not at all. For, Grigg knew, when he returned to his field, he would face court martial. What the verdict would be, he didn't know. But one thing was certain—he'd never fly a Spit again! At the least, knowledge of his true age would prevent that.

Driving his kite to the limit, Grigg flung it headlong down upon the fleeing German. They were all alone now, miles from the main event.

"This is for all the trouble you've made!" Grigg raged, loosing a cyclone of nickel-cupro upon the Focke-Wulf.

Vainly, the Nazi dodged from side to side—always to find Vickers slugs forcing him to turn, always a little to the northwest.

GRIGG flew like a fiend incarnate, using every trick, every device he knew. He was making the Nazi fly to England!

Apparently the main fight was over, for now, Green Flight was bunching about them, its pilots staring curiously at the spectacle.

Dawson's Spit weaved, shot in to polish off the German.

Without hesitation, Grigg slammed home a drag of glinting tracer across Dawson's nose.

Grigg roared into the flap mike, "Attention, Green Flight! Anybody who tries knocking down this Focke-Wulf will get shot at. Understand?"

Grumbles came from Green Flight. They rode watchfully above the strange caravan. They didn't know what to make of it. Von Schacht wisely made no attempts to escape, now. He evidently liked to live.

Over the home drome, Grigg switched to the German's band and roared

into the mike, "*Landen Sie—schnell!*"

Obediently, the German ace slanted down. The landing gear of the F.W. fanned out. The German slid into the field, BMW dead. Deftly, Grigg taxied up beside him. They were near an unused part of the huge field. Trees and an abandoned quarry where nearby.

Nobody noticed the ambulance that sped out to meet them, nor the young woman riding beside the driver, anxiously looking the pilots over.

Dawson hit the ground, first, running toward von Schacht who was climbing out of his ship. Grigg pounded at Dawson's heels, pulled the youngster aside.

Grigg spat, "Leave the Nazi alone!"

"What's the matter?" Dawson sneered. "Friend of yours? You certainly brought him home carefully!"

The German sensing an opportunity, whirled and dashed for the copse of wood nearby. In two dozen strides, Grigg was upon him. He spun the Nazi around. Von Schacht's fat lips were blubbing. Grigg hit him with all his might. Bones crunched.

The Nazi ace collapsed like a bag, rolling down an incline at the edge of the field. He screamed once, then disappeared over the abandoned calk quarry lip. He plummeted fifty feet down into lime-colored shallow water and lay there. It didn't take a doctor to know he was dead.

Grigg drew a shuddering sigh. He glanced defiantly at the awed faces about him.

Then he yelled, surprised, "Maris!"

The pretty girl was attired in the trig uniform of the WAAFs. She went to Grigg, limping slightly. She carried a walking stick upon which she leaned. Grigg said, proudly to the members of Green Flight, "Meet my sister—Maris Winslow!"

"I think I've got it straight," Major Masters said, in his quarters. "V

sister told me about it." He coughed. "It is quite an honor! Who hasn't heard of Maris Winslow—the WAAF who was piloting an ambulance Red Cross plane last year when a lone German shot her down!"

GRIGG said, "Right. Maris recognized the markings on the enemy plane—it was von Schacht. Maris had been in a hospital for nearly fourteen months, mending. I visited her every chance I got. That was where I was last night. They were giving her a final checking over before releasing her. Couldn't miss that, you know."

"But," interrupted the C.O., "how were you able to join the Eagles under the name of 'Grigg?'"

"I can explain that," the pretty girl said. "I did administration work also—and part of my job was to void and send back to the States identification papers of Americans killed here." Her smiling eyes clouded momentarily. "After I was shot down, I gave my brother appropriate papers of a man named Grigg who had no next of kin. They were in my personal care."

The girl paused pleadingly, "He wanted them only because he was too old for the Eagles. He couldn't bear just to test planes in England—when—"

Behind his hard mask of a face, Major Masters smiled. "I hardly believe anyone will care to prosecute a gentleman and a courageous fighter. Nor you, Miss Winslow."

He turned to the American. "Personally, Grigg—I mean, rather—Winslow, allow me to shake your hand, sir."

The American smiled at his sister. "Come on, sis," he said, "I want you to meet a good friend of mine." He laughed, jingled a key. "His name's McDougal, and he's probably very, very tired of being a guest in my set!"

TODAY IT TAKES MORE THAN GUTS

By
CHARLES KENNETT

Author of "Cannon in the Skies," etc.

In this war the Yank Flying Ace can't do it on courage alone—he must also have great physical endurance, wide technical knowledge, and outstanding airfighting skill!



In the dogfight that ensues, each pilot picks his man and goes after him!

ONLY twenty-five years elapsed between World War I and the present Armageddon, yet it proves amazing to compare the aircraft used for military purposes in the former conflict to the high-speed, hard-hitting armored airplanes of the latter. The change through the years has been gradual; inventive brains have been at work unceasingly not only in designing aircraft and producing guns, but also thinking out new aerial tactics. It is interesting to draw a comparison of aerial warfare as used in 1918 and that at the present moment. In 1918 the British and American Air

Services had at their disposal aircraft for pursuit work with a top speed of 125 miles per hour compared with the present day of 400 miles per hour and over. For that reason alone, it is not to be wondered at that training technique has been altered.

Bringing the argument down to concrete facts, the modern elementary trainer used for teaching service pilots has practically the same speed as the single seater fighters of the last war, ships such as the Sopwith Camel, the SE 5 and the two seater Bristol Fighter.

Before delving into modern warfare, let us examine the training technique. In the last war, a pilot's ground instruction consisted of a very elementary course in engines; the pupil was taught how to read a map and also a compass. There were never any long flights such as are undertaken at the present day, so the matter of variation and deviation and acceleration error, compass dip, etc., was not even gone into. A pupil received most of his ground instruction in gunnery, for in those days, a pilot handled his guns manually; they were not operated electrically like they are at the present moment. He would receive a few hours' instruction on Theory of Flight, and he had to learn the Morse Code, not that that was of much use to a pursuit pilot for he carried no radio whatsoever.

HIS flying instruction was a very hit and miss affair. My colleagues, who are still living, have on their log books approximately the same time dual instruction that I have, varying from two and a half to three hours. Now take the present day. The physical examination to commence with is much stiffer. Aviation medicine has advanced with such colossal strides that there can be no com-

parison of the present day and twenty-five years ago.

Today a pupil's instruction is a well thought out and carefully planned affair. His ground subjects are taken in conjunction with his flying. Not like it was before, where ground instruction was completed before the pupil ever saw an aircraft. At the present time, the average dual instruction for a beginner is from seven to nine hours before he is turned loose to do his first solo. That does not mean that his dual instruction ceases, for during his first fifty hours' flying, he will receive twenty-five hours' dual interspersed with his solo work.

Then having completed his first fifty hours, if he can pass the rigorous ground examination and flying test he will have made sufficient progress to proceed to his advanced training. Then he will be allocated to the type of flying he is most suited for, either a pursuit squadron or bombing, and he will be trained with that in view. As a combat pilot, he will not only learn the theory of aerial gunnery with its attendant deflection and shooting at high speeds, but he will get practical instruction as well.

The present day pupil, during his practical experience of aerial gunnery will not only shoot up ground targets, but he will actually practice on a target towed through the air by another aircraft so that he is enabled to get the actual experience of deflection when flying a fast pursuit ship. To draw a complete comparison between aerial fighting two and a half decades ago, and the present moment, let us first take a dogfight in 1918.

A squadron of Camels is opposed to an equal number of Fokkers. The Squadron Leader will be flying most likely at about twelve thousand feet if it is a clear day. He will be car-
ing on the back of his biplane long

streamers composed of various colors of linen so that when the squadron goes into action, the rest of the pilots will be able to pick their leader out. The Flight Commanders will also carry streamers on their machines denoting to their Flight who they are. The enemy will be sighted and the Squadron Leader will woggle his wings to denote to the squadron to peel off and go into action. The Flight Commanders in their turn will relay the orders to their Flights by the same procedure. Should the Squadron Leader not have seen the enemy, whoever sights them first will fire three short bursts from their guns in order to draw attention.

IN THE dogfight that ensues, each pilot will pick his man and go after him. The fight might be spread over an area of two square miles. The top speed is one hundred twenty to one hundred and twenty-five m.p.h. Pilots have no thought of a blackout at that speed, and with the machine guns synchronized to fire through the arc of the propeller, would only fire approximately at the rate of six hundred fifty rounds per minute, making a total of 1300 altogether. He will be able with his very maneuverable biplane to, so to speak, turn in his own length. A roll off the top or an Immelmann as it was then called presented no hazards. Another thing that has to be remembered, there were no parachutes in those days, neither was there any armored protection. The fuselages were constructed of wood with fabric covering. There was no such thing as a self-sealing gasoline tank if it was pierced by a tracer bullet. Every signal from Squadron Leader or Flight Commander to the rest of the Squadron had to be done manually.

As an illustration of how difficult it was to convey signals, there was a

when I was returning off patrol after I had been in a mixup with some Huns. I was unaware that my undercarriage had been damaged in the fight. As I came in to land after doing a circuit of the airdrome, a Crossley car raced down the field ahead of me while a mechanic stood up in the back seat holding a spare wheel in his hands. By that I knew something was wrong underneath, but I could not ascertain what it was, for my lower wings obliterated all view of the undercarriage, so I kept on circling the airport whilst they signaled me by a flash lamp operated from the darkened entrance of one of the hangars that my port wheel was in bad need of repair.

I circuited till the crash wagon and ambulance were ready and then came in to land as slowly as I could, holding my starboard wing well down. The resultant ground loop was not a very damaging affair, but if I had been running short of gasoline or had been wounded I would not have been able to keep on going round the airport whilst the message of the damage was conveyed to me by antiquated methods.

In contrast we have at the present day aircraft like the Hurricane and the P-40, the Spitfire and the P-47. A thing of the past are two guns synchronized to fire through the arc; instead, we have approximately eight machine guns firing at the rate of 1200 rounds per minute, and most likely the aircraft will also be carrying a cannon shell gun. Gas tanks are self sealing when pierced.

The old days of getting the blue bead of the gunsight lined up on the outer to inner ring are gone. Today there is the electrical gunsight on the windshield. The pilot of today has to have a much vaster knowledge than the pilot of the last war. Twenty-five years ago there were no flaps, no retractable undercarriage; instruments consisted of the main essentials, such as air speed

indicator, tachometer, and a few others.

Today the pilot of a pursuit ship has in the neighborhood of round and about sixty, all of them essential to efficiency. The modern pursuit pilot has to contend with not only his throttle, but his turbo-supercharger as well for flying at high altitudes. He has at the least eight guns operated electrically, which when he starts firing he can actually feel physically the check of his aircraft when he presses the fire button. Apart from all that there is the matter of his oxygen which he has to use for flying and fighting at high altitudes, and his radio to contend with.

HAVING shown the difference between the old and the modern pursuit ship, let us visualize a modern squadron going into action. The Squadron is on patrol. From Fighter Command Headquarters will come a quiet voice over the radio to the Squadron Leader—

"Bandits approaching Hythe—estimated altitude 25,000 feet—proceed."

Maybe the Squadron is 50 miles away at the moment the message is being received.

They are flying machines well over the 400 m.p.h. mark. They have been cruising at 15,000 feet. The Squadron Leader will quietly relay to the whole outfit—

"Bandits upstairs at 25,000—course so and so—climb to 27,000—let's go."

The whole Squadron without the waste of a second will advance their boost pressure and go into practically a vertical climb, level off and make for the rendezvous with the enemy. The Squadron Leader will then be informed again by Fighter Command the actual direction the enemy is taking, and the Squadron Leader will relay the orders as to which course to take so as to in-

tercept.

The enemy are sighted, and the Squadron Leader will give his orders somewhat on these lines.

"Well troops, there they are, fifteen degrees on the starboard. Tally Ho!" and the Squadron peels off and goes into action.

Whatever the outcome of the fight is, those who return will circle the airport as they let down their undercarriages, machines are being watched carefully for structural damage by the Officers of the Watch in Control. Through the earphones maybe will come the message.

"Red Fox number three—do another circuit of airport."

The pilot so designated will immediately continue circling and then Control will inform him,—

"There is something wrong with your undercarriage—retract both legs and come in on a belly landing in five minutes time. Have you enough gasoline?"

The pilot may consider his gasoline is almost finished, and report accordingly.

"Right. Cut your switches—come in—happy bumps."

So aerial warfare of today is a very different proposition from the last war. Today it requires not only the guts to win, but the modern pursuit pilot must be a skillful flyer and a technician as well.

His physical endurance must be first class, for whereas aerial fighting in the last war on a clear day was usually done anything from one thousand up to fourteen thousand feet, today the pursuit pilot may be called upon to fight at forty thousand feet above the earth where he is invisible to the naked eye.

The only thing to mark the path he is taking is the vapor trail he leaves behind him.

HERE'S HOW, HITLER!

by
ARNOLD CLAIRE

The Yanks are coming again—in Flying Fortresses, Airacobras, Lightnings, Wildcats, and Thunderbolts!

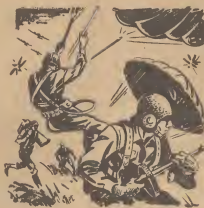
REMEMBER all the dirty names you called us, you stultified-brained halfwit? Remember the things you said about American stupidity, inefficiency, complacency, indifference, uncooperativeness and all the rest of your silly symphony of inaccuracies.

Well, we kind of fooled you!

From fifteen hundred planes a month, we—all those things you mentioned above—have humped out production to almost five thousand planes a month. Get your hanky, out, Schick, you dope, because you're going to have a nosebleed in a few minutes. Because this isn't all. Of course, there's our increase in shipping. Right up to eighty million tons in 1942. But this is 1943. And this is an Air War book—not a sea book—and we must stick to facts about Air.

We don't mind telling you how we do it, you murderous beer guzzler. We don't mind telling you what we do to send you our Flying Fortresses, our Thunderbolts, our Airacobras and Lightnings.

First, each design starts out as a secret. That's so you won't get too much knowledge about our plans until the plans are completed, the plan is warming up on the line, and it is across to you with a ready load



bombs, or bullets, or both.

A big engineering staff is required in the construction of a new plane. Each step of the ship's construction is meticulously worked out and scrutinized by one or more of a dozen major departments of this great staff of engineers. You see, Schick, their chief job, and ambition, is to give you and your kind the very best in engineering skill in the quickest and most efficient production of the finest and most destructive airplanes in the world. You know. Like our Flying Fortresses, for instance. They can take it, can't they, Schick, as well as dish it out?

First there is the project engineer. A member of this huge staff. His job is to take charge of a job or contract and to coordinate the work of all the engineering groups in the setup. He supervises and synchronizes the work of the draftsmen, the weight control group and the stress analysts. He also works with the designers and layout experts in adapting designs so the job will be simple to produce in large numbers. It is also his job to see that there is sufficient material and supplies on hand in the plant or on order, for the work to proceed unhindered and without waste of precious time.

The birth of the new plane usually

starts with a roughly drawn sketch. These roughs sometimes include the design and construction of wind tunnel models and mockups. A "mockup" is a full scale model of the proposed airplane made of a combination, of sheet metal, wood, and fabric, if you don't know, Adolf.

You know, there are such things as areas, shapes and sections of component parts of the new design and the aerodynamic division of the engineering staff sees to it that the flying characteristics of the job are checked. This is done in a specially built wind tunnel where tests are correlated with performance of the actual plane in flight. It is the duty of the stress department to check on the strength and safety of all the parts which, assembled, make up the finished airplane.

There are several other groups on the staff. There's the hydraulic group which considers the hydraulic installations needed to operate the wing flaps, or the retractable landing gears. The weight control section's part of the assignment is to see that the plane's balances and weight are kept within aerodynamic and specification requirements.

The power plant group has a vital job too. Since modern planes are built around the engine, this group selects all the parts of the ship which relates to the motive power such as the power plant itself, the propellers, cowlings, oil, fuel and exhaust systems. When the power plant designer selects the engine, prop and accessories for a specific design, he makes his selection in accordance with that design and performance requirements specified by the original designer and aerodynamic group.

The electrical engineering group, too, has an important job. It must see that all equipment run by electricity such as the radio, the inertia starter, many in-

struments, receive current sufficient to operate them.

They therefore design an adequate generator and battery system for this purpose. The instrument group takes over the work of installing all navigating and operational instruments and designs an instrument panel to hold them all, also providing the means to operate those instruments which work under pressure or vacuum.

Quite a job, so far, isn't it, Adolf? But we here in the United States feel that no job we can do is too good for you. We want you to get the best we can slap you down with.

As for radio equipment for installation in the new plane, that is purchased complete, or furnished by the purchaser of the new plane. In present times, usually the Army or the Navy and even the Coast Guard. But in any case, the radio engineers of the huge staff we talked about cooperate with all the other groups by determining what types will best be used in the job under construction and this group arranges for the electrical equipment to operate the radio installation.

When the plane is finally built and placed on the line for tests, the flight test department takes over and sees to it that certain flight requirements are met with. If not, they report on the action of the plane and improvements are made in it to bring it up to the standard the Army and Navy of the United States have set for planes, with the job of wiping you off the face of the earth in mind. This test department also makes the grand decision whether the new job is ready and acceptable for productions.

So, Adolf, when the job of making the best fighting or bombing plane in the world is completed—aren't you the lucky one?—we ship it right off to you with a load—a deadly load—of our compliments!

ALL-OUT WITH AIR POWER!

by
JUDE BRAYTON

Watch out, Tokyo, when the U. S. starts going all-out with air power!

AIR striking power will decide the War in the Pacific. The number of land bases from which airplanes can jump will be another factor. Aircraft carriers will help in the great decision in a major way; but enough land bases from which all types of planes can attack the enemy on the sea, and even Japan itself eventually, will be one of the major forces which will decide the War quickly and effectively for the United States and its Allies.

Carrier based planes have proven their deadly effectiveness. The torpedo carrying Grumman Avenger based on aircraft carriers proved its destructive possibilities in the magnificent battles off Midway Island and in the smashing victory attained by the U.S. Navy in the Coral Sea. But aircraft carriers are vulnerable—too vulnerable and they can be sunk as the Wasp, the Lexington, and others of their class have been. The Japs too have had their share of aircraft carrier losses. Theirs has been the major share in all their battles with the Naval Forces of the United States. But our own have been many and too costly. Land bases are not that destroyable.

But this is not a debate as to the merits of land bases as against aircraft carriers. This article deals with the value of the air in the Pacific



and how, without it, neither side can possibly hope to reach a decision. But the decision, thank heaven, has already been reached. This war will go to the side with the greatest number of planes to cooperate with the sea and land forces.

And the planes will not only comprise fighters, but heavy bombers, light bombers, medium bombers, torpedo planes, dive bombers as well as fast, light pursuit ships.

The war in the Pacific is affected by one great obstacle to range fighting. That obstacle is distance. That is why the side with the longest range flying craft will be the side which will be in a better position to deal out devastating blows to the home fronts. But the principle need—the need for bases from which these planes can strike, is a sufficient number of bases—land bases—dotted over the face of the Pacific. And when the war is won, these bases will be put to a most valuable use—converted to permanent airports for cross ocean transport service; and for policing the Orient against a possible recurrence of future aggression by political or military ambitionists.

Does the military of both sides recognize the value of land bases for aircraft? Japan does. It has fought desperately to regain Guadalcanal because of this recognition. The United States for it has beaten back every at-

tempt to regain that strategic Solomon Island group since it drove the Japs out of their almost impregnable stronghold. For it too recognizes that the defeat of the Japs in the Pacific can be achieved only through blasting them out of their bases, taking them over, and stepping from one island to another, thus get closer to Japan itself which it may bomb right into the hell the Japanese believe is heaven with impunity.

Billy Mitchell knew this. Knew that the Aleutians offered just that kind of air base.

And today, the Japs themselves are proving it by their entrenchment on Kiska and Attu from which the bomber Squadrons of the Army Air Forces is trying to blast them.

Large forces are not engaged in the attacks on the islands in the south Pacific.

Large forces are not necessary for the islands themselves are not extensive. But strategically they are vitally important.

General MacArthur realizes this and his recent victories at Buna and New Guinea give him new bases from which to launch greater raids on the islands to the north. As more of these islands are acquired, more destruction can be piled on the very vulnerable Japs. The continued acquisition of the Pacific islands will shorten the great distances between vital points, and make it possible for large enough bases to work from for planned attacks in the regaining of Singapore, Burma, French Indo-China and the reopening of the Burma Road. And air power is obviously the answer; air power land based at distances not too far from the objectives to be regained or destroyed.

The Yankee paratroopers are of necessity airborne. For experience has proven that airborne troops may

landed where seaborne troops must fight to gain a beachhead with the possibilities of losses greater than with airborne infantry. The value of airborne troops over seaborne was proven in the operations carried out on New Guinea.

An aircraft working at long range from its home base is greatly handicapped.

Its radius of action is affected by its ability to carry sufficient fuel to take it out to its objective, and to return safely to its home base. The Pacific Ocean is a vast ocean with thousands of miles between bases. Aircraft carriers cannot base Flying Fortresses. Therefore, the necessity for land bases is acute and the sacrifice of men and materiel in their acquisition no sacrifice at all if the objective is successfully attained.

The process is slow—but it is sure and the results to follow will prove the efficacy and effectiveness of land based planes over carrier based for the loads a land based plane can carry are greater. The shipbased bomber is limited in its take off distance. If a land-based bomber is somewhat overloaded on the takeoff, it can still be safely handled without losing it in the water. But again this is not the argument. The discussion is that land bases will have their greatest value in their use as future bases in civil operation. As mere territory to be gained through War they mean nothing; but as bases both in war and peace they mean everything.

Air power alone won't do the whole job and those in power in the Air Forces know this. Each step taken to gain land bases requires action by sea; action by land with both tied together by action by air.

Air power alone won't win the war in the Pacific—but it will go all out in regaining the v

SCREAMING STEEL

by
JOE BROCKTON

The valiant R.A.F. fought not like a few, but like a deadly many that didn't know the meaning of defeat!

THE Battle of Britain raged furiously from Land's End at the extreme left of the huge harn that was England, to the point north of Newcastle-on-Tyne, that coal mining center sandwiched in between the huge British shipyards in Sunderland to the south, and Tynemouth on the north.

The English Channel was black with the shadows of deadly planes of the German Luftwaffe. Huge Dornier bombers escorted by Messerschmidt 109's and devastating "Stukas" which opened the way for them by cutting down everything in their path which might hinder their carrying out their mission of death, laid waste to everything beneath their blistered fuselages.

For days the battle raged in a fury the like of which had not been known since time began. Men died thousands of feet above the once quiet earth. And the little fistful of men who comprised the flying personnel of the R.A.F. fought not like a few, but like a deadly many which knew no meaning of defeat.



The Luftwaffe got through to London, and in spite of the heroic blasting of the R.A.F., fell in ruins and flames under the burning fire of the German onslaught. Forty thousand Londoners were killed.

When the lull came

after the deadly storm; when the wounded and the fortunate untouched could cry out in their pain and anguish and fierce anger, their voices rang around the world: "Reprisal! Reprisal! Bomb Berlin! Bomb Berlin!"

But Berlin would have to wait. There was a more important job to perform. The Luftwaffe would be back again. Again and then again. They would have to be stopped. Not over England, but over Germany. The fuel that made them swing into life and bring devastation and ruin and bloodshed to the people in England, must first be destroyed. The oil must be turned to water and black smoke.

One million and a half tons of oil lay in the outskirts of Hamburg. The oil that flowed through copper veins in steel housings that crumpled huge for-

cost of industry like a boy crumples an egg crate. Hamburg. The very place to start. That city was vast. One of Germany's most vital production centers. Smash the source of supply and the Luftwaffe will not get off the ground.

TWELVE Vicker's Wellington long range bombers were rolled out of a hangar somewhere outside of the City of London. Twenty-four Bristol "Pegasus" engines soon roared a swan song for Hamburg as they thundered into the air, dragging the heavily loaded Wellingtons with their deadly cargo skyward. Twenty-four Spitfires and as many Boulton Paul Defiants roared off the apron while the forty-eight Merlins played an obdiligant of death in accompaniment to the song of the Bristol "Pegasus."

At twenty-five thousand feet the squadron and escort nosed northwest and crossed the Channel to soar over France for Hamburg and the oil tanks.

The bombardiers made sure everything was in proper order.

High over Belgium they rode unmolested into Germany. The huge Wellingtons rode on escorted now only by the two-seater fighter "Defiants"—the Spitfires had turned back over Holland when it was seen that the Wellingtons had everything their own way and were not interfered with for the range of the Spitfires was not as far as Hamburg—and the squadrons drove past Essen, and on to Bremen.

Antiaircraft batteries found them for the first time midway between Bremen and Hamburg and shrapnel pounded dangerously close. A quick signal from the escort Squadron Leader and three Defiants peeled off and dived earthward, their Merlins screaming frighteningly as they tore for the gun emplacements below. The rest of the Defiants continued to ac-

companied the Wellingtons on.

The ack-ack battery's staccato barks rose up to meet the onrushing British planes accompanied by pounding shells that vomited steel splinters through rapid spasms of black smoke. The Defiants swung into single file as they neared the battery and with full-throated roars whipped for the guns and the men who encircled them the Colt point .30's tearing unmercifully into them.

As one battery was silenced, one of the diving Defiants with two American Eagles at the controls rocked with sudden shock; the engine coughed, spluttered, twitched a moment, then died. A heavy bump into shellborn terrain; a ripping and tearing sound and the undercarriage ripped away.

A moment later, the low wing monoplane broke apart, and lay still.

Unhurt, the gunner and pilot fought desperately in the stricken plane to keep a Mauser carrying gang of green-grey uniformed Nazis from getting them. The gunner crept into his stricken ship and manned the M.G.-40 Colt guns; the pilot lay nearby exhausting the ammunition in his side-arm. But the fight didn't last long. A stray Mauser bullet blasted through the gunner's right shoulder and silenced his guns. The War was over for this pair of American volunteers in the R.A.F.

Back at the prison camp, the pilot glanced through his window that night. Darkness brought a red glow in the skies to the north of them. The glow told him that the oil tanks outside of Hamburg were ablaze. One million five hundred thousand tons of precious fuel for Germany's armored might were a blazing inferno—and not even the devil himself could put the fire out.

The pilot smiled to himself in the darkness of his prison hut. The expedition had

SILVER WINGS MEAN HARD WORK! by MORSE CHANDLER

Know why the 47th Training Squadron plasters a Dodo Bird on the fuselages of its planes?

EVER hear of a Dodo Bird? It's said to be the dumbest thing on the face of the earth. But dumb or no—its silly physiognomy graces the fuselages of the training planes of the 47th Training Squadron of the Army Air Forces somewhere in the United States.

The Dodo bird was discovered by a Portuguese sailor. It was sometime in 1507—just before you were born—that the man, a little seasick and sick of the sea, searching for dry land to parch his wet throat on, stuck his telescopic spy-glass to his eye and sighted the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean.

Calling the captain, he conjectured that that would be a nice place to put into for a bit of solid relaxation. The captain of the vessel agreed with the sailor—as sea captains always do—and ordered soundings taken while he stuck the helm to port—or starboard—as the case then demanded, pointing the nose of his ship toward the palms and giant ferns lining the shores of the island.

But the captain soon discovered that the island was surrounded by coral reefs and that the entrance to its beautiful harbors was dangerous. He ordered the anchor lowered a few miles off shore and had several members of his crew paddle him between the corals to the shore.

Once upon dry land the captain heaved a heavy sigh of relief. For though it was a little generally known,



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and although he had spent the greater part of his life on the seven oceans of the world he despised water.

He and the other members of his crew stood on the beach and waited for the reception committee of the local Lion's Club but there wasn't a Lion, or a Rotarian in sight. As they stood and waited, they were aroused to a strange indignation by a sound that was much like the blending of the basso profundo part of a Bronx cheer and the coloratura-contralto of a rare old Oceanic raspberry.

Startled, the captain and his men raised their puzzled eyes from the jungles ahead and lowered them again for they beheld nothing that could sound so stupid. Lowering them, they caught sight of the creature which gave off that peculiarly sickening sound. It was then that the human eye saw, for the first time, the waddler we know as the Dodo bird.

It was a thing of rare beauty. When they glanced at it the men gasped at its combination of colors. Living on an island surrounded by other birds, it could neither fly—nor swim.

Much has been written on the Dodo bird. Experts in ornithology have written volumes on the bird. They describe it as large, or larger than a swan; had a large head, little or no wings, and tail consisting of a few curly feathers. The Dodo was seen several hundred years later by some Dutch sailors who promptly named it a *Walgvogel*, or "nauseous bird," because no chef of the period could cook it to anybody's taste let alone the blinkin' king's. It was also said of the bird that it hadn't the good sense to get out of the way of a jeep of the period even when it was shoved out.

Now, almost five hundred years after the first white man got a sickening taste of its unpalatability, and shot the dope into extinct 47th Training

Squadron of the Army Air Forces decided that this was the bird to symbolize the general makeup of the student personnel of the Squadron. Without great strain, or stress of ceremony, it was painted on the sides of the instruction ships of the school squadron and there it remains in all its dumb eloquence, evidence that, contrary to general belief, all Dodo's—particularly of the human variety—are not entirely extinct.

The original 47th Aero Squadron—daddy of the 47th School Squadron—was an old World War unit organized at Kelly Field, Texas, July 20, 1917 as the 47th Provisional Aero Squadron. The following month it was redesignated the 47th Aero Squadron. This unit served with the American Expeditionary Forces in 1918 with the French and remained in France until July 5, 1919 without even sticking its bill out once in a single aerial scrap.

THE unit was returned to the States and was demobilized in July, 1919 at Camp Devens, Massachusetts. It was not until three years later, September 1, 1922, to be precise, that the 47th School Squadron was assembled at Brooks Field, Texas, and on April 8, 1924, the members of the 47th Aero Squadron of the first World War were reconstituted and consolidated with the 47th School Squadron.

Because simplicity is the personification of most flight fledglings, the dopey Dodo was decalqued to the sides of the naive neophytes training planes. This was by way of a needle to stimulate the tyro's thinking into guzzling as much flying knowledge as he possibly could before he wrote home to the girl he left behind him that he was a sonof-a-gun at the controls.

The legend has it that the original Dodo—the Adam Dodoes—inhabiting the wilds of one king



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size egg on a bundle of seaweed. So satisfied was he with this magnificent gesture, that he retired from his egg laying for the rest of his life—and took it easy from then on. This cannot be said for fledgling pilots. They start laying eggs the minute they join the Air Force; and continue to lay them with or without invitation, until General Somebody pins their pretty silver wings on their chesty chests.

The original Dodo had a blackish bill. This was tipped with a large, horney hook; the cheeks were partly featherless, its legs squat, stout and yellow. Its plumage was dark ashcolored, with breast and tail of white. Its wings were yellowish white and the bird itself ended in a short tail of curly tuft. The 47th's insignia is a grey Dodo, with yellow legs and wings on a white disk within a black border wearing an aviator's helmet in yellow while a pair of goggles dangle from its scrawny neck.

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and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me—no matter how useless or helpless you may be—all this can be changed by the human Power I'm talking about. And there can be no other Power, can there? Of course, you would like to know if God, so that these good things too. Well—Dr. Frank Idaho, and teaching will

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by
JAY D. BLAUFOX

*Being a radio operator was okay,
but the kid's first love was still the
waist guns in a Flying Fortress!*

THE medical officer told Stanislaus — "Stinky," for short — Fields that with that one good eye he had he would never be able to hit a barn door. As a gunner he would make a better radio operator. So they sent him to radio school and graduated him in good time. But he never got over his first love; the eager desire to caress the waist guns in a B17E.

One day the waist gunner of the big bomber caught Stinky—now "Sparks"—going over his guns and he got sore.

"Keep your lousy hands off those guns," he cried. "Don't you realize that what little life there is in that carcass of yours might depend on those pea-shooters?"

"I wasn't monkeying with them," replied Stinky mournfully. "But I enlisted as a gunner and they turned me over to the radio section. Said I only had one good eye."

"That's funny," grinned the gunner. "I wanted to be a radio op' and they made a gunner out-a me. Said my left ear was no good—stone deaf." Then he had a proposition. "Tell you what," he said. "You teach me radio on the Q.T.—and I'll show you how to tickle

Stinky and his gunner
in the belly of the
as warm and stuffy
up with them a lot
air which hung
hands. Henderson
mind them. Stinky

was at his radio and the gunner at his guns. The big Flying Fortress was out on a reconnaissance mission and the boys were ribbing each other over the intercoms. Word had reached the islands that a Jap Armada was massing for another try to retake Guadalcanal.

The big ship was riding into the sun. Blinded by its rays, the Skipper missed the eight Zeros diving down at him. It was only a matter of seconds. Six Zeros smashed at the Fortress from the two sides covering the pilot's compartment and without even scratching the men in the compartment, shot the instrument panels to pieces.

Back in the waist of the gun, the gunner lay bleeding on the floor. Weakly he called to Stinky. His right shoulder was smashed. His side kick was killed in the first blast. Stinky rushed to his aid. Patched him up and dragged him to the seat in front of the radio where he clapped the earphone on the gunner's head and stuck his good arm on the brass key. He rushed back to the guns. With his good eye he smashed at the Zeros; his guns blazed filthy epithets of flame. Three of the eight Zeros went down.

OVER the intercoms the pilot called for navigational direction. Clouds enveloped the big Fortress and obscured the earth and what they had seen of the Armada below. The gunner at the radio gave him what he wanted. Stinky heard it in the phones as his guns continued to blast at the Japs.

Stinky heard the cry "Bombs Away!" He glanced over the side through a rift in the clouds and saw a bomb a direct hit.

The Flying Fortress was hit and got home under escort of fighters from the one remaining Fortress.

The two boys were in the base when they heard the officers didn't know

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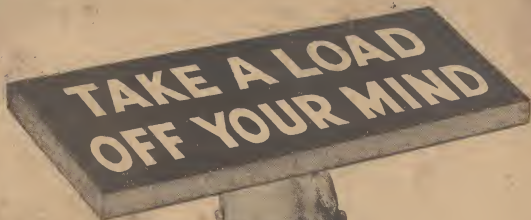
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